

As Strange As It Seems by DylanJ10000

Category: IT (Movies - Muschietti), IT - Stephen King, Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Byers & El Move To Derry, Crossover, Good Parent Jim "Chief" Hopper, Good Parent Joyce Byers, Jim "Chief" Hopper Lives, Post-Chapter One, Post-Season/Series 03, Russians Everywhere, Set in October-November 1985, The Upside Down

Language: English

Characters: Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Dustin Henderson, Eddie Kaspbrak, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Erica Sinclair, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Hanlon, Mike Wheeler, Murray Bauman, Nancy Wheeler, Pennywise (Mentioned), Richie Tozier, Robin Buckley, Sam Owens (Stranger Things), Shadow Monster | Mind Flayer, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

Relationships: Ben Hanscom/Beverly Marsh, Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier, Eleven | Jane Hopper/Mike Wheeler, Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper, Maxine "Max" Mayfield/Lucas Sinclair, One-Sided Bill Denbrough/Eleven | Jane Hopper, PAST Bill Denbrough/Beverly Marsh - Relationship

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2019-11-27

Updated: 2019-11-28

Packaged: 2019-12-19 03:01:51

Rating: Mature

Warnings: Graphic Depictions Of Violence

Chapters: 5

Words: 20,281

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

After the Battle of Starcourt- after losing her father- Jane 'El' Hopper moves in with the Byers family. Three Months Later, they're all packing to move to Maine. Derry, Maine, to be exact.

The It/Stranger Things Crossover nobody asked for, but one that you're getting nonetheless.

1. Chapter One: Welcome To Derry

Author's Note:

Hey there!

Welcome to my fic! I'm sure the It/ST Crossover concept is super overdone and nearly-beaten-to-death, but I couldn't help but want to write this fic. I formerly had two fics concerning a crossover, but they weren't... ahem... good, per se. I decided to scrap them and start over, and it's already working like a charm! Whereas the old fics had near-to-no reads/views, this one has already had 16 hits in the past week! I'm super excited to do this, but I've gotta set a few rules of how my fic works. Y'know how it is!

1) For starters, as there's two Mikes (Mike Wheeler & Mike Hanlon), one will be addressed differently than they typically are, so as to differentiate them. Mike Hanlon will be addressed as 'Mikey', while Mike Wheeler will be simply addressed as 'Mike'.

2) As It (2017) is set during the Summer of '89, I've opted to backtrack the It Timeline back a few years. Instead of The Losers' first bout with Pennywise being in '89, we're gonna put it back to the Summer of '85 (Before, during, and a little after ST3 takes place), while Georgie Denbrough is killed in October of '84 (Shortly before the start of ST2).

3) I will be completely canon-compliant with the Stranger Things Canon, and I'll try the best I can with It Canon, but, if something needs to change, it will most likely be It Canon

I guess that about covers it. For now, at least.

So, for those of you who had trouble following the

timeline in the rules, I'll lay it out for you here!

November, 1983: Will Byers goes missing (Stranger Things Season 1).

June, 1984: Soviet Government attempts to open The Gate, to disastrous results

October, 1984: Georgie Denbrough is killed by Pennywise; Mind Flayer attacks Hawkins, Indiana (Stranger Things 2).

December, 1984: Hawkins Middle Snowball '84.

June, 1985: The Losers begin Summer; Pennywise attacks them individually

July, 1985: Assault on 29 Neibolt Street; Battle of Starcourt (Stranger Things 3).

August, 1985: The Losers defeat it, rescuing a kidnapped Beverly, and avenging Georgie

September, 1985: The Losers make an oath to come back if It isn't really dead.

October, 1985: Byers + El leave Hawkins, IN; Soviets have American Prisoner & Demogorgon (Stranger Things 3 Epilogue).

October 17, 1985: Byers + El move to Derry, Maine (Strange As It Seems).

Summary for the Chapter:

The Byers & El arrive at their new home; El & Will stumble across something in the woods

October 17, 1985

"We're close?", El asks as she watches the slick-as-glass river passing by her as the U-Haul powers down the interstate. Joyce looks at her,

a small smile on her face. "We'll be there soon, sweetheart", she says, "Just give it a few more hours". El lets out a small huff. They've already been driving for *eighteen hours!* How much longer? She tries not to be impatient. Hop always said it was rude to voice impatience. Hop. God, how she misses him. That night at the mall was certainly a rough one, to say the least, but she had never expected it to turn to be one of the worst nights of her life. Hop. Her *father*, being the selfless man he was, sacrificed himself for them all. She knows it's selfish, but part of her wishes he hadn't. He'd still be here, though the world would likely be over.

"You know", Joyce says, snapping her back to reality, "I know it's been tough. With... everything. I don't think we should do this alone, okay, sweetheart? You know you can talk to me, right?". El nods profusely. Joyce isn't just her friend and guardian, she's the closest thing El has ever had to a mother. "Doctor Owens gave me a few contacts in Bangor. Therapy. I thought about going myself, maybe take Will with me too. I know how you feel about doctors, so I'm not gonna pressure you, but if you want to, I'll gladly take you", she continues. El makes a face.

"What's Ther-a-pee?", she asks, making sure to sound out each individual syllable. Joyce smiles, always patient with El's questions and vocabulary, like Hopper had been. "Therapy is a place you go to tell someone about your feelings. People that went to school so they can help understand and help you. Will went to therapy for a while after he...", she says, trailing off. El gets the gist of where she was going with it. "Anyway", Joyce continues, "It helps you feel better when you feel sad. You can cry, scream, laugh... and the therapist won't judge you for it. All they want to do is help you feel better".

El nods, not completely understanding, but she can understand some parts. Nice people who want to help, like Mike. "I can talk about Hop?", she asks quietly. Joyce nods sadly. "Yeah, you can. That's what I was gonna go for, too. We can talk about Hop, and how much we miss him, and the therapists will help us feel better", she says, "But, if you don't want to do it, I won't *make* you do it. It's *your* choice, sweetheart". El hums while in thought. If Joyce trusts it enough to try it, that's good enough for her.

"Kay", El says, "I'll try". Joyce grasps the girl's hand. "We'll get

through this", she says, "It just takes some time". El nods. "But we remember the hurt", she says, thinking back to the letter, "because the hurt is *good*". Joyce nods. "That's right", she says, "If you ever feel doubtful about it, though, we can stop, okay?". El nods. The two sit in comfortable silence before El's walkie picks up a transmission. "*El?*", a voice says, "*El, are you there?*". A big smile grows on El's face. *Mike*.

"Hi, Mike", she says happily, "Still not there". A click. "*Wow, I really thought you guys would be there by now*", he says, "*Anyways, I was just checking in, and I wanted to tell you something. I found out my cousin lives in the town you're moving to!*". A grin came to El's face. "Really?", she ask, "What is his name?". A wave of static briefly comes through, before another click. "*His name's Richie. I just want to warn you, though. He might look like me, but he definitely doesn't act like me*", Mike laughs, "*But I told him you and Will were coming, and he said he'll give you both the grand tour of Derry once you get there. Just let me know when you're there so I can call him with your address*". El nods, though he can't see her, and she speaks. "Okay", she says, "We'll be home at six-one-five".

"Okay!", Mike says, before El hears a bit of whining in the background, "*Sorry, El, I gotta go. Dustin wants to call Suzie, and I can't argue with him since he's letting me use Cerebro*". El's disappointed, but says, "Okay! Tell Dustin I say hi!". She and Mike exchange goodbyes before she hears the Cerebro switch off her channel. Joyce looks at her, laughing slightly. "Did you really tell him that we're gonna be home at 6:15?", she asks, "I'm not even sure how much farther we have to go". Sure enough, they arrive a little late, at 6:45. The house sits on a small hill in a nice neighborhood. El exits the U-Haul and spots Will. "This is sure gonna beat biking all the way into town, since we're already here", he says happily.

El takes a look at their new home. It's a nice, two-story home, painted a dark grey with white window panes. *Pretty*, she thinks as she smiles slightly. Jonathan opens the back of the U-Haul. "Alright, guys, let's get to unpacking, yeah?", he says, grabbing a stack of boxes before hopping down and heading up the sidewalk to the door. El wonders how they were able to buy the house, considering she was aware how much the old house sold for. As if Will's reading her mind, he says, "Doc Owens helped pay for it. We had half, but then he said that he'd

help pay by matching what we had. Said he owed you and Hopper for what you did". El silently thanks the doctor in her mind. He did, after all, help Hop with everything on top of that after she closed The Gate.

Carrying the boxes into the house, Joyce allows the two teens to get first pick of the bedrooms. El and Will look at each other before bolting up the staircase, surveying each room until they make their decisions. Will, of course, picks the bedroom on the backside of the house, as it has the most natural light. "You should probably pick one of the rooms with the personal bathroom", he says, "Then you don't need to worry about waiting for Jonathan and I". El leaves the room with the personal bathroom and large walk-in closet for Joyce, opting for the more quaint bedroom of the two that have personal bathrooms. Its window overlooks the street below, El able to see all the way to town square. "Pretty", she says to herself.

The next few hours are spent emptying the U-Haul, bringing every last ounce of furniture and items of importance from the old house into the new house. On top of that, the furniture from El's bedroom at the cabin, having been recovered earlier in the week after they discovered her bedroom door was closed, leaving her room completely untouched, was moved in as well. El looks through the boxes of things recovered from the cabin before finding the box labeled *Hopper*. She opts to immediately carry it up to her room, safely and carefully stowing it away in the top of her bedroom closet. Next comes the countless pictures into her room, and she places them atop her dresser, in order of priority. Hopper, Mike, Joyce, her friends, and so on.

"Hey", Joyce says, knocking on the door frame, "You settling in okay?". El nods. "It's nice", she says, "Needs new paint". Joyce nods as she comes in, crossing her arms as she looks at the walls. "I'd say that's a pretty decent observation", she says, smiling, "How about we go get some paint tomorrow and repaint the house? Give it our own mark". El nods happily. "I want teal", she says, "Hopper helped me pick it when we painted my old room". The light in Joyce's eyes falter for only a second at the mention of Hopper, but she quickly recovers. "That sounds like a *great* idea", she says, "Your dad always did have an eye for that kind of stuff".

Joyce leaves the room at Jonathan's voice requesting help at the end of the hall, leaving El to decorate her room. She spends the rest of the hour meticulously putting up her clothes into her closet. She finds the black romper with swirls and colors from the day she and Max had their 'girls day'. She smiles and sets it aside to wear tomorrow. She hears a call from Will down the hall. "El! I set up the phone!", he yells, prompting her to practically sprint down the hall and snatch it from him, immediately dialing the Wheeler's number. The phone rings twice, as it usually does, before someone picks up. "*This is the Wheeler residence. Nancy speaking*", Nancy says through the phone. El smiles. "Phone is working", she says, and she hears Nancy snort. "*Why, hello, El. Nice to hear from you, too*", she says, laughing.

"Mike!", El hears her yell, "*He'll be here in just a second*". The squeaking of shoes can be heard in the background as she hears the phone change hands. "*El? El, is that you?*", Mike asks excitedly. El snorts. "No, this is Lucas", she says, doing a very exaggerated imitation of her friend. "*Ha ha. Very funny*", Mike deadpans, "*I'm guessing the phone line's set up?*". El nods excitedly, though only Will can see her, and he giggles as he watches her. "Yes", El says, "I'm setting up my room. Gotta go. Wanna talk to Will?". Will snorts at the thought of his friend's face as she says it. "*Yeah, sure*", Mike says, "*Have fun. Love you*". El smiles and bites her lip. "Love you, too", she says, handing off the phone to Will before running to her room. In all honesty, she really didn't want to leave him with Will, but she remembered Hopper's letter explaining boundaries, and how Mike had said Will was feeling left out and detached from his friends before the Fourth of July.

"So, how's everything back home?", Will asks, "The town hasn't burned down in the day we've been gone, right?". Mike laughs. "*No, but we've been planning something*", he says, "*We thought about maybe coming up with Nancy around Halloween, since she's already going and all. Of course, Steve, Robin, and Erica want to come too. All Erica's been talking about is how she's gonna be the baddest badass to place D&D*". Will smiles happily. "That sounds great! How long are you guys coming up for, hopefully?", he asks. He hears Holly scream, followed by a loud whack and Mike coughing furiously. "*Holly, quit, I'm on the phone!*", he yells, returning to the phone call, "*We were planning on staying a week. the thirtieth to the sixth. Sound good?*".

"That sounds perfect! I have enough time to go check out what's going on around here, too. It's no good if we don't know where we're going, right?". Mike snorts. "*True*", he says, before Will hears Mrs. Wheeler yell in the background, "*Shit, I gotta go. Holly's ballet recital's tonight*". Will can hear his friend's complete and utter displeasure at the end of his sentence. "Have fun with that", Will says sarcastically, "I'm sure you'll have *lots* of fun!". They say their goodbyes, and hang up the phone. Will sighs as he thinks to what his other friends are doing. Probably at the arcade, since they can't exactly go to the movie theater anymore, and nobody wants to go to *The Hawk*.

He walks down the hall to El's room, where she's sitting on her newly refurbished bed, reading a book. "Hey", he says, "How about we go check out the town? We gotta be ready for when our friends come for Halloween". El perks up at the mentioning of Halloween. "They're coming to trick-or-treat?", she asks. Will nods. "Yeah, so we gotta scope out the perfect places to get the big candy bars", he says, "Wanna come?". She sighs. "Can't", she says, "No bike". Will snorts. He says, "Who said we had to ride bikes?". El grins and snaps her book shut, throwing on one of Hop's old flannels before hopping off her bed. "Let's go", she says with a toothy smile.

Soon, they're bolting out the door and into the crisp, October weather, the sun just beginning to fall from its high pedestal in the sky. A storm cloud can be seen brewing in the distance, quickly approaching. El and Will glance at each other. "You wanna take the chances?", he asks. She thinks a moment, then nods. "We've handled worse", she says, "I think we can handle getting wet". Will nods, and soon they're walking down the street, headed toward the town center. "Doesn't look like much", El notes, noticing the several closed storefronts, "Wonder why everyone is closed early?". Will nods in agreement, and continue to the town square. Again, nothing much.

Later, they're walking by a large, red bridge. "Hey, maybe there's something down there", Will says, pointing to the other side of the small road fence, down a hill and to the water, "Wanna check it out?". El nods. "Let's be careful", she says, looking at the sky, "Rain". Sure enough, the rain starts to fall slowly, before turning into a complete torrential downpour. El and Will continue into the forest. It's quiet at first, but they begin to hear voices pretty quickly. "Geez,

Rich, are you okay?", one says. Another voice audibly scoffs. "Take a look at his leg, dumbass. It's obviously not okay!", it says. El and Will slowly close in on the voices, with six children coming into view. They look around their age, and one is holding his bloodied leg. *One that looks like-*

"Mike?", El quietly asks, only enough for Will to hear. She steps forward, a twig snapping under her feet. The boys all quickly dart their eyes in their direction, visibly surprised to see them. "Uh, hi...?", the overweight boy of the group says, though it sounds more like a question. Knowing El's way with words, he steps closer as well. "We're new in town. We were just taking a short hike", he justifies, before looking at the boy known as Rich's leg, "Are you okay? That looks like it *hurts*". A smaller boy looks as well. "We were walking-probably just ahead of you, actually- and some ground gave in and he tumbled down the hill", the boy says.

"Do you need help?", El asks, concerned with how much blood was coming from the boy's wound. Though not life-threatening, it was a deep gash that would most definitely scar. She continues, "We can help you out if you need the help". The boy with the wound stands up, hobbling lightly. "Nothin' can keep good ol' Richie Tozier down for the count, but thanks, anyways", he says. Something clicks in Will's brain. Rich. Richie. *He looks like Mike. Mike has a cousin named Richie. Ding! Ding! Ding!*

"Wait, you're Mike's cousin!", Will says, "We're the ones you were supposed to show around town. I'm Will, and this is my sister, El". It clicks in Richie's brain, as well. "Well, fuck", he says, smiling, "I should've known when you said you're new to town". He limps forward, sticking out his hand. "Richie Tozier's the name, and Voices are my game!", he says, "Pleasure to meet 'ya!". Will appreciatively returns the gesture, as does El. Richie begins introducing the other boys he's with.

Starting with the smaller boy, he says, "This is my one and only Eddie Spaghetti!". The boy rolls his eyes, though he has a smile on his face, and mumbles something. Going to the curly haired boy with the scowl, he says, "This is Stan the Man. Staniel here's a Jew- means he killed Christ". Stan lets out a scoff and rolls his eyes, though his dark demeanor quickly disappears. Next, Richie introduces the overweight

boy. "This is Haystack, aka Ben", he says, "Ben's our resident historian for this shithole we call home". Ben waves and chuckles quietly. Next, Richie moves to the tall, lanky boy who's remained quiet. "This here is Big Bill", he says, "Bill's got a stutter, but he's pretty much our leader-guy". Last, but not least, he introduces the dark-skinned boy next to Bill. "This is my main man Homeschool, aka Mikey", he says, "Mikey's pretty much our rock. Always there to get us out of sticky situations". He looks at all the other boys. "Together", he says, "We're the Losers Club".

El wrinkles her nose at both the nicknames Richie has given his friends, and at Mike's name. "Richie already knows who we are, but I'm Will", Will introduces, "and this is my sister, El. El doesn't talk much, so don't expect much outta her". El gives a small nod, the boys acknowledging her affirmation. Will continues, "We're from Indiana, and I'm best friends with Richie's cousin, Mike. El's actually dating him". Richie's eyes go wide, realizing that the girl in front of him is the badass girl his cousin was so head-over-heels in love with. "So, since we're all here", Richie proposes, "How about we give you the grand tour?".

Will smiles and nods. He says, "That would be great. Sure beats not knowing where to go". Will thinks about somethings. He's not even sure where he *lives* at this point. "Shit, I'm not even sure where our house is", he admits to the others, causing El to look at him with slight fright. Richie notices, but doesn't say anything. "What street do you live on?", he asks. Will thinks a moment. Something like Johnson? *No, that's not it*, he thinks, *Is it Jackson?* "I think we live on Jackson Street?", he says. Bill looks up and smiles. "T-That's where I l-l-live. Mikey and I both head that w-way, so w-w-we can show you the way back". El eases to relief, thankful to have people to show them the way home. "Thank you", she quietly says, giving Bill and Mikey small smiles. Both boys blush viciously.

As they head up the hill, Will remembers Richie's leg. "Hey, do we need to stop somewhere so you can get that patched up?", he asks. Richie waves it off. He says, "I'll just pick some stuff up at the pharmacy when we stop there". Will nods, and soon the boys are picking up their bikes. Will look down, slightly dejected. "We don't have our bikes", he says. Richie shrugs. "That's alright. Will, you hop

on my pegs. El, you can ride with Bill". Bill blushes slightly at the mention of his name, scooting forward to let El on. "Y-You ready?", he asks the girl, who smiles and nods. He begins pedaling forward, standing up to bellow, "*Hi-Ho, Silver! Away!*".

Soon enough, El and Will have been introduced to the theater, arcade, and school, before the group stops at the pharmacy to let Eddie patch Richie's leg. From there, the group pedal towards a dead-end road. "We usually hang out down that hill", Richie explains, "We call it 'The Barrens'". Pedaling on, the group ends up a small ways outside of town at a quarry. "We usually hang out here when it's warmer. It's s-s-s-still warm enough, but n-not near as warm as it is in the S-S-Summer", Bill explains. El continues to look at the scenery as they pedal by. "Do you have a mall?", she asks, hopeful that there's a place as fun as Starcourt was for her, though she only went shopping there for a day.

"Nah, the nearest mall to here is in Portland. Our friend, Beverly, moved there and she's practically at the mall there all the time", Richie says, "We usually send her lists of stuff to mail to us, with some cash, and she'll send the stuff back if they have it". Richie thinks back to a few conversations he'd had with Mike prior to El and Will's arrival. He'd explained that El's dad was killed when the mall had burned down, and thought it would be best to tell Richie not to bring up her dad to her. Richie, in turn, would have to explain to the other Losers later. Pedaling towards the town square. Reaching the steps of the library, the group opts to take a rest from the now-light rain. "What tt-time is it?", Bill asks. Mikey looks at his watch. "Almost eight-thirty", he says, "Probably about time we all get home".

"Agreed", Stan says, "Dad'll kill me if I'm out past nine". The others agree and begin getting their bikes. "We're all headed to The Quarry tomorrow, if you want to come?", Richie says to Will and El. The two glance at each other before Will nods. "That sounds like a great idea. Do we meet somewhere?", he asks. Richie shrugs. "Usually in front of Bill's, so we'll probably be there. If not, you know the way to The Quarry". He waves goodbye, pedaling quickly up the street to catch up with Eddie, Stan, and Ben. "So, that leaves four", Mikey muses, "C'mon, we'll show you guys the way to Jackson". The boys opt to walk their bikes alongside El and Will, which Will is grateful for.

"So", Mikey says, "You guys are from Indiana? Richie's talked about Mike some for the past few weeks".

"Yes", El affirms, "Mike and our friends are coming up for Halloween". Mikey nods. "That'll be fun", he says, "Maybe we can all go trick-r-treating together". El smiles and nods, excited to have new friends and plans in the near-future. "You live on Jackson, too?", Will asks Mikey. The boy shakes his head. He says, "I live on a farm a little ways outside of town. It's just easier to head up Jackson to get there". Bill nods in agreement. "J-Jackson's a small s-street, so I probably live a f-f-few houses down from you g-guys", he says. El and Will nod at both statements, with Will noting how Bill's stutter gets worse in some instances, like when he's nervous. *Especially around El for the last few hours*, he thinks.

Soon, the set of four are standing in front of the emptied U-Haul at the Byers House. "I'll see you guys tomorrow", Mikey says, "I gotta get home for supper". He waves and pedals down the road and out of view. Bill points to a house across the street, about 3 or 4 houses down. "T-That's my house", he says, "I-If you guys need anything, l-let me know". Noting the walkie in the side pocket of Will's bag, he adds, "I'm on C-Channel 7". Will acknowledges and nods. "Thanks for letting us hang with you guys tonight", he says. Bill smiles. "N-No problem", he says, "Do you guys w-want me to wait for you tomorrow?". El nods. "Yes, please", she says, adding, "Thanks for the ride earlier". Bill blushes. "I-It was n-n-nothing", he says, before looking up the street, "I need to g-get going. See you t-tomorrow!".

Watching the boy pedal down the street and up the his driveway, Will laughs. El looks at him, confused. "What's funny?", she asks. He looks at her with a big grin. "He is totally crushing on you, El", he says. She snorts. "You think so?", she asks. Will lets out a laugh. "His stutter got worse every time he talked to you, not to mention the blushing. He's definitely got a crush on you", he says. El begins heading up the stairs to the sidewalk leading to the porch. "Oh, boy", she says, causing Will to laugh even harder. *Welcome to Derry*, he thinks, before heading inside himself.

2. Chapter Two: A Theory

Summary for the Chapter:

Will & El adjust to Derry; The Party prepares for a visit; El finds someone at therapy; Jonathan receives unsettling news from Murray

October 28, 1985

The past nine days have been nothing short of wonderful for El and Will. Aside from already making some good friends, El has already acclimated very well to her new school environment, considering that Joyce kept her home-schooled for the entirety of August, September, and October. Not seeing their friends back home has been an adjustment, but their new friends have been nothing but helpful and supportive. El and the boys are leaving school for one more day at The Quarry before it finally gets too cold for them to handle. "Just swim today?", El asks Will, referring to their first time at the quarry, where they went cliff jumping, with El having memories of Mike jumping at Sattler Quarry.

"Yeah", Will says, "We'll just swim, okay?". Normally, Will would be anxious when it came to El swimming, but, thanks to Steve stepping up and, along with Robin, teaching her to swim in the two months before they left, he doesn't need to worry as much. Having packed their swimsuits in their bags, unlike the others. Getting on their bikes, El having been gifted Mike's old bike by Nancy whilst she was visiting, they speed towards the quarry, promising to meet the boys there. Stopping at a gas station nearby, they put their swimsuits on before continuing the ride. Pretty soon, they reach the quarry, the water calm and a bright turquoise color. Will helps El down the steep rock edge, finally reaching the bottom. He takes a moment to look up at the cliff's edge. He looks at El and asks, "You think it's okay if I just do *one* jump?".

El looks a little weary of it, but gives a nod nonetheless. Will smiles and swiftly makes his way back up, disappearing from view, and reappearing at the jump area. Yelling as loud as he can, Will jumps, doing a front flip as he falls to the water below. He hits the water

with a loud and large splash, before rising a few seconds later. "T-The w-w-water is f-f-freezing", he says, shivering. El giggles and dips her toe into the water, quickly snatching it away from the water. It indeed is cold. Looks like they've missed their refreshing day at the quarry. "Oh, William! You're just being a pussy!", a voice yells from the cliff's edge. The two turn up to see Eddie and Richie. "W-Why don't y-you give it a t-t-try, then?", Will says, his teeth now chattering from the cold. Richie proceeds to jump, landing just next to Will, ascending from below with chattering teeth just like Will. Eddie gives a loud fit of laughter from above. "You dumbass! He told you!", he yells, before returning to his fit of giggles.

"Where are the others?", El asks, noting their absence. Eddie huffs, coming down and sitting just next to her. "Mikey got stuck doing chores", he drones, "Ben had some errands to help his ma with, and Bill has some thing to do in Bangor". El nods, before coming to a stop at the mention of Bangor. *Bangor. Therapy. Shit.* "Shit!", she yells, using that word that Hopper, and now Richie, use so fondly, "Will! Bane-gore! Late!". Will pales, quickly swimming to the shore. He pants, "Shit! Mom's gonna be pissed if we're late! Even worse, that we forgot!". El and Will begin gathering up their items, much to Eddie and Richie's confusion. "Late for what, exactly?", Eddie asks, not condescendingly, but out of genuine curiosity. Will turns to him. "We have a therapy appointment in Bangor pretty soon. Completely forgot about it", Will explains, before adding, "We've seen a lot of stuff the past few years. Trust me". Eddie nods. "So I guess that means you both gotta go?", he asks, slightly bummed that he'll be left with only Richie for the remainder of the day.

"Sorry", El apologizes sincerely, "Feel bad". Eddie smiles slightly at her. "Don't feel bad", he says, waving his hand, "Shit happens. People forget things". Will and El wave goodbye before beginning to head up the rocks. "Good luck with the shrink!", Richie yells after them. They both disappear from view, and he turns to Eddie. "So, Eds", he says, wriggling his eyebrows, "Shall we?". Eddie scoffs and gets up. "You're such a dumbass. C'mon, let's get outta here".

Mike hates airplanes, despite having never been on one. He doesn't like the concept of being in a big, metal tube, filled with fuel and

flimsy wire that could easily snap and spark, and blow them all to hell. But, when Karen offered a plane ticket to ride with Nancy to visit the Byers and El in Maine, he immediately took it. Even more, he hadn't expected for his friends to tell him the same exact news of what *their* parents had offered them, as well. *Damn parents and their colluding*, Mike thinks. The only one that hadn't gotten offered a trip to visit their friends was Max, though that quickly changed when she asked her mother, still recovering from Billy's death, for a ticket to her best friend. Now, after weeks of planning and anticipation, the party, plus Nancy, are now waiting for their flight in the airport terminal.

"Man, could the airplane get here any *slower?*", Dustin groans, getting antsy from all the waiting. Mike doesn't blame him. They've been in the airport since 6 AM, and have been sitting and waiting for the past *three hours*. Surely, the plane would be there soon. Nancy seems to want to keep everything quiet, so she pulls a ten-dollar bill from her small purse. "Here", she says, "You guys go get something to eat. Just make sure to bring me back a pretzel or something". Dustin grins. "Sure thing, m'lady", he says, swiping the crisp bill from her hand. The four teens stand, heading for the food court at the other end of the terminal concourse. Grabbing Nancy a pretzel, as asked, the four sit at a table, munching on their snacks. "How long is the flight gonna be?", Max asks, "I mean, Maine isn't *that* far, right?". Lucas snorts. He asks, "It took the Byers and El *two* days to get there, and you don't think the flight will be long?". Max smacks him on the arm. "You want another break-up, Stalker?", she asks, only semi-serious.

"What? I was just answering your question", Lucas says, throwing his hands up in defeat. Dustin stays quiet, counting on his hands. "Five hours", he says, "It should take us about five or six hours to get there. So, no, we shouldn't be long". Max nods. "Thanks for that, Dustin", she says sincerely, "You're doing a better job than my stalker boyfriend, over here". Dustin smiles, though he catches the quick glare from Lucas from the corner of his eye. Suddenly, the intercom voices, *Flight 1832 to Bangor, Maine: Now Boarding*. The teens glance at each other before bolting down the concourse for the departure gate. Luckily, the line is still fairly long, signifying that they haven't started boarding Economy Class, yet. They approach Nancy, who is

waiting for them near the back of the line. "You know that you could've easily been left behind, right?", she asks, gratefully taking the pretzel from Dustin. The teens grimace, wondering what they'd do in that situation. "I guess we'd call Steve to pick us up, right?", Max asks. Suddenly, there's a yell from down the concourse.

"Hey, *wait!*", Steve Harrington, with Erica Sinclair and Robin Buckley in tow, yells as he runs, quickly wheeling suitcase behind him. Erica, even from a distance, can be seen rolling her eyes. "Do you *see* how long that line is? They're not going anywhere, *nerd*", she says with sass. The trio reach Nancy and the teens, huffing and puffing. "*What* are you doing here?", Mike asks. Erica gives them all her trademark glare. "Did none of you really not *think* to *ask any of us* if we wanted to go?", she asks, "That's *rude* as *hell!*". Robin rolls her eyes, but nods. "She's got a point. I mean, we've all been though shit together. Why *wouldn't* we want to visit some of the only other people that get what we've been through?". Lucas eyes the airline ticket in Erica's hand. "How did you get that?", he asks. Erica smugly looks at Steve. "We, uh- We just bought them at the front desk", he explains, "When Mrs. Sinclair said you were all headed to Maine, we got here as fast as we could".

"We had enough money from Scoops and Hawkins Video, so it wasn't a big deal", Robin adds, "We just wanted to get away, too, y'know?". Max nods, looking at the teen boys and Nancy. "I can relate to that, can you?", she asks, them. They each nod, agreeing with Robin's sentiment. "Well, the more the merrier, right?", Dustin says, happily throwing his arms around Erica and Steve's shoulders, "Scoops Troop, reunited for, yet again, another glorious adventure!". Erica smirks, saying, "I guess you could say that it's a *Neverending Story*, Dusty-bun?". That leaves the whole group howling with laughter, sans Dustin, who's now about as red as a tomato. The group manages to compose themselves, though not enough, as whenever one makes eye contact with another, it sends them back into a fit of giggles. This continues until it's their turn to board the plane. As they all hand in their tickets, they all head up the jetway. "*Turn Around! Look at what you seeeeeeee!*", the group sing-songs the entire way, much to Dustin's complete and utter genuine embarrassment.

"Hi, you have reached the residence of Murray Bauman. Mom, if this is you, please hang up and call me between the hours of 5 and 6 PM as previously discussed, okay? If this is Joyce, Joyce, thank you for calling, I have been trying to reach you. I have an update. It's about, well, it's probably best if we speak in person. It's not good or bad, but it's something", the voicemail says as Joyce attempts to call, continuing to ramble until the beep finally comes. "Murray, it's Joyce", she says, cigarette in-hand and lit, "I just got your message, and I, uh, am calling like you said to. But, you're not answering, so I'm just gonna leave you my address and phone number, okay?". She leaves her address and phone number before hanging up the phone. What the hell did Murray want, after all this time? For starters, she hadn't seen him since about two weeks after Starcourt, where he finally felt comfortable to leave and return to Sesser, but not before telling her that he'd call if he ever found something.

Just *what* is it that he's found? It couldn't have anything to do with the Russians. They'd all fled and escaped before the military even got to the mall. It couldn't be about The Gate. They'd made sure that it was closed. So *what* is it? She just has to wait for Murray to call back. *Shit*, she thinks. She *can't* wait for him to call back, because she, El, and Will have therapy appointments in Bangor today. "Jonathan?", she asks, walking upstairs to her eldest's bedroom, where he sits on his bed, looking through the photographs he's taken throughout the day. He looks up at her, looking at her innocently. "Hey, Mom", he says, "What'd you need?". She leans on the doorway. "Murray left a message, said that he had some news about something. I left him one, but I need someone here in case he calls back. Therapy appointments", she says, giving a look that silently asked him the lingering question. "Sure, Mom, I'll stay and watch the phone. Besides, somebody's gotta get the house ready for tonight", he says, smiling broadly.

Tonight. She forgot that the kids were coming, though she's had it written on the calendar in the kitchen for *weeks*. "I'll stop and get some pizzas on the way back from Bangor, okay? We shouldn't be more than a few hours", she says. He nods as Joyce hears the front door open and quickly shut, followed but the light footsteps of both of her soaked-to-the-bone teenagers. "What's up with this?", she asks, gesturing to their soaked bodies. Will pants. "Forgot about therapy",

he rasps, "Went to the quarry". El pats him on the back. "Got here as fast as we could", she says, "Will went *really* fast". Joyce nods in understanding, ushering them to their rooms. "Don't worry about it, I forgot, too, but we don't want to be late. Change *quickly*, please", she says. The two comply, only being in their rooms for a total of five minutes, before emerging, prepped and ready to go. "Now", Joyce says to Jonathan, "I think Nancy and the kids are taking a Greyhound from the airport, so they shouldn't be here too long after us".

"Got it, Mom", he says, smiling, "I've got it". Joyce smiles and touches the side of his face. "When did you grow up on me so fast?", she says, "You were just a tiny baby, like, five *minutes* ago". He hugs her and waves them goodbye, watching as the three piled into the Pinto, driving the mere forty minutes before finally arriving at Bangor Mental Health Institute. Parking the car, they swiftly walk inside the rather large, brick building. After navigating the building for what seems like hours, though it's only a few minutes, they finally make it to the therapy office. Will doesn't wait long, being taken back a mere ten minutes after sitting down. Joyce is called on not long after, which makes El nervous. "Hello there, Joyce", Joyce's therapist says, "Hello, Miss Jane. I actually have been told by your therapist to let you know that you have a different type of therapy today". This confuses El. She likes her therapist. Does her therapist not want to see her? Does she not like her?

"Miss Jackie noticed that you have some trouble reading and comprehending", Joyce's therapist explains further, "She's busy with another patient today, but she had an idea to let you try some speech therapy today. She asked me to help you get there in case you hadn't gotten there yourself. Is that okay with you?". El thinks about it. She *does* have trouble with reading, sure, and she's not sure what 'comprehending' is, but she has a feeling that it will help her figure it out, so she nods. "Okay", she says politely, "Speech Ther-a-pee". Joyce's therapist smiles and nods, taking El's hand and leading her with Joyce. He stops and lets Joyce into his office. "I'll just be a quick second", he says, "Speech Therapy waiting room is down the hall". Joyce nods and waves goodbye to El, who waves back. She's led down the hall to another waiting room, slightly more colorful than the last, that's a lot more empty. Well, save for another child. She doesn't catch it at first, but on second glance she realizes she

recognizes the other child. Baseball shirt. Auburn hair. It's unmistakable. "Bill?", she asks, prompting the boy to look up.

Bill always gets bored waiting for Therapy. The waiting room is *always* empty, and there's nothing to do in there, besides a few books that he's no doubt read about thirty times during his years of speech therapy in Bangor. Aside from that, there's usually *nothing* and *nobody* in the waiting room, which is why he's surprised when he hears his name being called, and why he's even more surprised to find El shyly standing by the door. "H-Hi", Bill stutters, not showing his slight confusion and surprise at her being there, "What're y-you doing h-h-here?". She looks down at her feet, looking unsure of what to say, before finally returning to his gaze. "Therapist was busy. Told me to go here instead", she says. Bill nods. At least he isn't lonely anymore, and, better yet, he's with *El*. She slowly inches forward from the door, before sitting next to him. He's figured out, during the last few weeks, that talking and socializing isn't really her strong-suit, so they sit in comfortable silence for a few minutes.

"What are *you* doing here?", she asks, turning the tables on him. He shrugs. "I-I'm here s-s-so I can help m-make my stutter b-b-better", he explains. She cocks her head, furrowing her brow. "Stutter?", she asks, as if implying she isn't aware of what a stutter is. Will had briefly explained that El came from a bad home life before her father got her, so he figures that it had to have put her behind on the learning curve, so he elaborates anyway. "Y-You know when I get stuck on w-w-words?", he asks. The small explanation isn't much, but seems to be enough to spark a connection for her. "Your funny talk?", she asks innocently. He snorts. "Y-Yeah", he agrees, "my f-f-funny talk". She smiles, before turning to dig into her bag, pulling a bag of M&M's from it. "Want one?", she asks, holding out the small bag out. He obliges, holding his hand out to gather a small handful from it. The two joyously joke around and throw M&M's across the room and into the bowl holding newspapers on the end-table.

The two continue this for about twenty minutes before the boredom finally begins setting in. With not even a TV to keep them company, it's gonna be *very* irritating for the two teenagers. Glancing at his

watch, Bill realizes that the office is closing in a few minutes. "S-Shit", he says, "The t-t-therapists must've gotten too busy", he says, "Should we l-l-leave?". El looks at the door. Taking a leap of faith, she nods. "Yes", she says, "Let's get outta here. Do something fun". She stands, heading for the door, while Bill just looks on after her for a second. She turns to find him still sitting in his chair. "You coming?", she asks, which prompts him to launch himself out of his chair. He says, "Y-Yeah. Let's g-g-go". They head down the hall, with Joyce spotting El through the window, assuming that El's session is over. Waving to Joyce, El continues through the door to the main waiting room to find Will alone. "Hey El- Bill? What're you doing here?", he asks as he looks up to find the two coming through the door. Bill sticks his thumb out to point behind him. He says, "S-Speech Therapy".

"Mom's gonna be a little while longer", Will says to El, before turning to Bill, "Where's your mom?". Bill sighs. "S-She had to get back home, so she g-gave me money for a b-b-bus ticket", he says glumly. His change in tone makes El frown. "You'll come with us", she says, not bothering to ask if he wants to. He blinks. He asks timidly, "A-Are you s-s-sure?". El nods seriously. "Friends don't leave friends behind", she says, as if it's a code to live by. Will assures him that it's alright. "Seriously, you live, like, practically next-door to us", he justifies, "It's no trouble, at all". Bill smiles, silently and gratefully thanking them both. Will looks up at the fluorescent lights in the ceiling, and he shivers. "I *hate* hospitals. You guys wanna go find a park, or maybe a bite to eat?", he asks, "While we wait for Mom to be done, at least". The girl and other boy nod, also wanting to get out of the creepy, cold, super-sterile hospital. Will very briefly ducks through the door to let Joyce know where they're going, before setting off on their new adventure for the afternoon.

Dustin can usually keep himself occupied or content, but, after so long, he starts to feel irritable and antsy, such is the case about three and a half hours into their five-hour flight. *Just ninety more minutes*, he thinks, *then we're with Will and El and Jonathan and Mrs. Byers*. Telling himself that waiting shouldn't be hard and *actually waiting*, unsurprisingly, have *very* different. Between Steve's awkward flirting with the blonde across the aisle from him, and Erica's

jabbering about 'My Little Pony', it's becoming very hard to at least *try* and wait it out. He desperately wishes to be paired with Lucas, or Mike, or Max, or Robin, or, hell, even Nancy, but, *no*, he just *had* to pretty much pull the short straw when it came to seat partners on the plane. He wishes he were at least able to talk to *Suzie*, but, 1) He doesn't have Cerebro, and, 2) He's on a goddamn *airplane*! Son of a bitch!

Meanwhile, Mike, Lucas, and Robin are in a very captivating discussion about Back To The Future. "I'm just saying, it's a little weird when Alex P. Keaton makes out with his mom", Robin says, throwing her hands up in the air. Lucas scoffs. "But it was okay in Star Wars?", he argues. Mike snorts loudly, causing the older man across the aisle from him to wake up, earning him a glare. "Can't we just agree that it's a good movie?", he asks, ignoring the man's continued glares. Both look at him like he's ruining their conversation. "Mike, we're trying to keep a conversation going so we can at least *try* to pass the time", Lucas says, "I think you might want to move seats if you don't want to hear it, because this is gonna continue for *a while*. Robin gives him a light-hearted look of apology, saying, "Sorry, kiddo". Mike groans loudly before getting up for the bathroom.

Nancy and Max are paired on the outer side of the aisle, with Nancy having the window seat. Nobody took the seat next to them, so Max took the opportunity to space them out a bit. "So", Nancy starts, "How're you doing?". Max looks at her, bright red eyebrows furrowed. "Fine...?", she says, unsure of what she means. Nancy rolls her eyes light-heartedly. She says, "No, I mean how're you *doing*?". Max nods, getting what she means. "It's been hard", she says, "but I've been getting better. Well, except for last week". Nancy leans towards her from across the seat in-between them. "What happened?", she asks quietly, making a point to be sure that nobody is listening in on their conversation. Max sighs. "I was doing the laundry on Saturday, and, somehow, one of his old wife-beaters ended up in the wash", she elaborates, "I cried for nearly three hours". Nancy looks on sympathetically. "I can relate to that", she says, "When Barb died, it took me *ages* to go into the library, because Ms. Marissa always wears this blouse that looks *just like* this one that Barb absolutely loved". She looks out of the window for a second. "Does it ever get better?",

Max asks genuinely. Nancy looks back to her. "I don't think it ever really get's any *easier*, but you just learn to *live with it*, y'know?". Max nods, before leaning her chair back and dozing off for a nap.

Jonathan is in the bathroom, lights off and with a dark-light, essentially coating the bathroom in a bright crimson, working on his photographs, when he hears the phone start ringing. He begins running into the hall, down the stairs, and around the short corner to the phone. Picking it up, he asks, "Byers Residence, Jonathan speaking. Who is this?". There's a sound of someone putting some papers down, before a voice asks, "*Where's your mom?*". Jonathan laughs dryly. "Hello, Murray", he says with mock-enthusiasm, "Mom's at therapy right now, but she told me to get a message from you in case you called". He hears the man sigh. "*Shit. How long 'til she's back?*", Murray asks. Jonathan looks at the clock. 4:57. "Not for another hour or two, so you're better off telling me whatever this update is that you've found, right now".

The man sighs yet again. "*Fine, I'll tell you*", he says, "*but you need to promise not to get any hopes up, because I'm not even sure if this is a definite lead*". Jonathan nods, though the man can't see him. "You got it. Boy Scouts Honor, y'know?", he says. Murray takes a deep breath. "*I was looking back at the files and reports from after Starcourt- Owens managed to let me get my hands on them- and I noticed something*", he says. Jonathan listens closer. The man continues, "*I noticed that, in the case of the explosion of The Key, remains were recovered and account for, for all, with the exception of one*". Jonathan can already feel where this is going. "We knew that they didn't recover anything of Hopper, Murray. Hence, the empty casket at the funeral". He hears the man scoff on the other end of the line. "*I know. That's why I didn't think it was unusual, until I found out that they captured a Ruskie that was trying to escape. The guy apparently admitted to the knowledge of handing off an American Prisoner that night, Jonathan*", he reveals. A breath get's caught in Jonathan's throat. He finishes, "*I have reason to believe that The American is Jim, Jonathan*".

3. Chapter Three: The American

Summary for the Chapter:

The American is interrogated; The Party arrives in Bangor, as does someone else; Bill catches up with someone; Jonathan relays the news

October 28, 1985

"What the hell do you mean?", Jonathan asks angrily, "How long ago did you get these files?". Silence through the static. *"About 2 months ago"*, Murray admits, *"But I wanted to do the research and get my cards in order before I told any of you. I promise"*. As much as Jonathan wants to be angry, he can't help but understand what the other man is saying. He didn't want to give anyone any hope. Mom and El, specifically. "How much research and evidence do you have that validates this theory?", Jonathan continues asking. Murray sighs. *"I've got transcripts from the Russian we caught confessing, detailed documents of Russian activity after Starcourt from Undercover Intelligence in Moscow, everything"*, he says. Jonathan takes a seat on the floor, next to the phone. "Shit", he says.

"Yeah, shit", Murray agrees. Jonathan is silent for a second. "What do you want me to tell Mom? Like, what *exactly* do I say?, he asks. Murray exhales deeply. *"I'm not sure. Just- tell her to give me a call and I'll tell her what I told you, okay? Can you do that?"*. Jonathan licks his lips. Yeah, yeah, I can do that. Do I tell the others?". Murray huffs. *"I mean, that's up to your discretion. If you want to get false hopes up for everyone, be my guest, but I highly advise you not to"*. Jonathan nods. "Yeah, I get it. Still, I'll probably let them know *something*", he says. Ruffling of papers can be heard on the line. *"Yeah, okay. Gotta go, kid. Tell your mom to call me at six"*. Jonathan nods again. "Will do", "Thanks, Murray. Bye", he says. He hears the phone click, and the line starts to buzz.

Project: INDIGO Facility: Kamchatka, Russia.

"Вставай, грязная, американская мразь", a guard yells, jolting a very thin, very worn, and very tired Jim Hopper awake in his cell. Hopper groans. "Shit, you asshole", he mutters, "You understand, you fuckin' assholovsky?". The guard simply glares at him, before spitting at him and hitting him with the butt of his assault rifle. "Be glad that you're still useful to us", the guard says, before darkly adding, "Hopefully, not for much longer". Another guard comes in, and the two drag the former police chief to his feet. They drag him along the concrete hallway floor he's become so familiar with for the past two months. If he's being completely honest, Hopper doesn't even know if it's been two months. It feels like an eternity of Hell.

Dragging him to the interrogation room, Hopper can make out the distorted and echoing screams coming from the stairwell to his right. It's something he's heard more than anything while confined in this shithole. *What the hell is going on down there?*, he thinks, before the stairwell disappears from view, and he's thrown into the interrogation room once again. It's become a biweekly ritual since he arrived in the facility. They take him from his cell, interrogate, or *try to*, then they torture him a little, and throw him back in. He's handcuffed to the table, and the asshole they've had interrogating him, Ozerov, comes through the door on the opposite side. "Hello, Jim Hopper", Ozerov greets, as he typically does every time they meet, "Are you ready to talk?". Hopper laughs darkly. "Am I ever ready to talk, Ruskie?", he taunts. Ozerov wags his finger. "Tsk, tsk, tsk", he says, "Why can't you be as cooperative like sailor boy?".

"Harrington wasn't being cooperative, you fuckin' *drugged* him. The girl, too", Hopper says angrily, "Lucky for you, that shit's useless on me. I dealt with worse in Vietnam". Before Ozerov can reply, there's a knock at the door. "If you'll excuse me", Ozerov snarls, before exiting, leaving Hopper alone in the interrogation room. It's quiet in there, and, though the voices echo, and they're slightly muffled, he can hear the conversation between the person who knocked and Ozerov. "Сэр, у нас есть новая информация от американского доктора", he hears the man say. Hopper had listened enough between his cell and the interrogation room to pick up a few words. He just picked up *Doctor* and *American*. "Было ли это больше информации о

девушке? Мы уже знаем о ней. Она боролась с этим монстром в торговом центре", Ozerov says.

"Нет, насчет монстра. Другой мир, а также", the other man says. There's a moment of silence before Ozerov asks a question. "Какова судьба доктора?", he asks. Hopper leans a small bit closer. Something happened, he knows that much. New information, possibly from this American Doctor. "Мартин Бреннер будет казнен в течение часа. По приказу Степанова", the man says. Hopper froze. *Martin Brenner*. Hopper manages to piece together that Brenner gave information, and, now, has outlived his usefulness. It's bittersweet. *But, just what did he tell them that was so important?*, he asks himself.

Bangor, Maine Amtrak Station

The lowering sun is a welcomed sight as Beverly Marsh disembarks from her train in Bangor, Maine. After the hours-long delay at the station, she's glad to finally be near home. It's funny, because, as much as she wanted to get away from the horrors of Derry, she find herself wanting to go back just as much. None of the boys know she's coming. It's a Halloween surprise, and she is ready to catch up on the past two months and get to trick r' treating. All that's between that and herself is a thirty-minute bus ride on a Greyhound. As she turns to get her ticket, she stops as she notices the line. It's practically out the door and down the side of the building. So much for a quick ride. *Still*, she supposes, *I could go get a bite to eat while the line gets shorter. I'm starving*. As she makes her way through the hustle-and-bustle of the small, city streets, she finds a nice, well-kept park, with a few food stands littered throughout. Paying for a dollar hot dog, she finds a seat at a nearby bench.

She sits in comfortable silence for a few minutes, eating her food, and about to take out her Walkman, when she hears joyous wail coming from nearby. "El! G-Get down from there!", she hears a voice yell, "W-What if you fall and break your n-n-neck or something?". Beverly can hear the joy and laughter in the voice, and it almost sounds like- *No*, she thinks, *Can't be*. But could it? The voice sounded a bit deeper, but it sounded all the same. She turns to look at it's source, and, sure

enough, there's Bill Denbrough. He's taller, lankier, and has a bit of a tan, but she could spot that auburn hair from a mile away. He's with another boy, and the two are watching as a girl swings herself by her legs on a tree branch. She contemplates whether to turn and wait until later, but decides against it, and she begins to walk over.

"So much for my big surprise", she says, and she notices how Bill perks up at the voice, and looks around for it's source, settling on Bev, about twenty feet away. His green eyes blow wide, and his goofy grin gets about ten times bigger. "B-B-*Beverly!*", he yells, practically breaking into a sprint. He tries to slow himself, but ends up unintentionally tackling her into the grass. The wind is blown out of her, but she starts laughing, and finds that she can't stop herself. Soon, Bill is joining in, and they find themselves gasping for breath a few minutes later, while being watched from a distance by El and Will. Soon, they go to silence, before Bill finally asks, "W-What're you d-d-*doing* here?". She snorts, finding his stutter utterly adorable. "Halloween. I wanted to surprise you and the other Losers, but I guess that didn't work out", she says, a smirk on her face.

"If it h-helps, I w-w-won't tell them", Bill says, "s-s-so you can surprise them". She smiles and hugs him. "I've missed you boys so much", she murmurs into his shoulder, before looking up to see El and Will, "Are you going to introduce me, or am I going to be the random person that awkwardly crashed a friendly hangout?". Bill looks confused for a second, before his eyes widen and he grins, "Oh, yeah! C'mon", he says, dragging her to her feet. They walk over before Bill begins introductions. "Guys, this is Beverly", he introduces, "Bev, this is El and Will. They're n-new to town". Will smiles and holds out his hand. "So you're the famous Bev that the guys are always talking about", he says, "It's nice to meet you". Bev obliges and shakes his hand. She looks to El, who stays silent, but smiles and waves. "El doesn't talk that much", Bill and Will simultaneously explain, before looking at each other, going into a fit of laughs.

The landing on the Bangor airstrip is a rough one, but nobody seems to mind, in heavy anticipation of seeing their friends after a long two weeks. It takes a few minutes, but the group is finally allowed to depart the plane. Dustin is the first to run out, dramatically getting to

the airport floor and kissing it. "Oh, sweet, sweet Earth, how I've missed you", he says, putting his forehead down onto the cold tile. Erica gives a disgusted look. She asks, "Do you *know* how many people have walked on this floor? Do you *know* how many *germs* there are?". Steve nods in agreement. "Yeah, dude", he says, "That's kind of super gross". Dustin looks at the floor a second, before making a disgusted face. He gets up, vigorously wiping his lips on his jacket sleeve.

"C'mon, guys, we haven't got all day", Mike says, quickly trudging forward to the airport's Greyhound Ticket Line. Max snorts. "He just *can't* stand it", she says. Lucas looks at her. He asks her, "I mean, can you blame him? I'd be doing the same thing if it were you and me". She blushes slightly and smiles. "Feeling's mutual, Stalker", she quips. They take each other's hand, and follow Mike. The line quickly passes, and, soon enough, they have eight Greyhound tickets. While the others go to get in line for the bus, Nancy tries to place a call to the Byers Residence. *No answer*. Nancy hums a questionable hum, before hanging up the payphone. She looks up to see Steve and Robin hanging back for her. "No answer, huh?", Robin asks. Before Nancy can ask, she adds, "If he answered, you'd still be on the phone, right now".

Nancy smirks. "Yeah, no answer", she says, "A little weird, considering someone *always* picks up the phone, but I'm not too worried. Maybe it's their therapy day or something". Steve looks at her. "They have therapy?", he asks. She nods. "Joyce wanted El and Will to try it with her. After Hopper and everything, y'know?", she says, meeting his eyes. Steve nods. He's been going to therapy, as well. After Starcourt, the recurring nightmares of what happened down there in the Russian Base became too much for him to handle, so he could understand Joyce wanting to seek help. Nancy adds, "They actually go to therapy here in Bangor. Derry's pretty much the Maine version of Hawkins, but with a closer city". She'd done some research on the small town shortly after the Byers left, finding an alarming number of children's disappearances and murders.

It's slightly off-putting, but her mind was put at ease when she read in a newspaper copy that a boy was arrested near the end of Summer, after murdering his father and two friends. The police attributed him

to the other disappearances and murders, so they locked him up in the insane asylum someplace. Now, the town was normal and peaceful, and El, Will, Joyce, and Jonathan could finally have some peace and normalcy for the first time in years. She looks over, seeing the Greyhound pulling in, while Mike waves her over. "C'mon!", he yells over, "We haven't got all day!". She smiles and rolls her eyes, before elbowing Steve in the arm. "We should get going, guys", she says, "Let's go". With that, the group begins the next leg of their journey to Derry.

"Portland's great. Much better than Derry, y'know?", Bev says as she munches on a candy bar she procured from the dollar store across the street, "But it's not the same. Not without you and the boys". Bill nods as they sit at the bench, watching El and Will throw a Frisbee, also procured from the dollar store. She notices Bill's eyes light up as he watches El smile. *She's pretty*, she thinks, *Really pretty*. "So", she asks, "What have you and the boys been up to? What about these two?". Bill smirks as he looks at his hands. "We haven't done much. We cleared out the clubhouse, biked around, went to the quarry. It wasn't the same without you, though", he says. She marvels that he spoke without stuttering once. Those speech therapy sessions must be doing wonders.

He continues, "El and Will got here about a week and a half ago. They helped us out after Richie hurt himself. Turns out El is actually dating Richie's cousin. He and his friends are flying in to visit today". She notes the disappointment in his voice, but doesn't push it. It's clear that he likes the girl, but Bev knows Bill enough to know that he's not a girlfriend-stealer. It also gives her slight hope. Maybe she can find her way back to his heart after all these months. "Speaking of boyfriends and girlfriends", she says, deciding to be brave and see, "we never talked about the...". She doesn't know exactly where to go with it, but he interrupts. "K-K-Kiss?", he offers, and she notes that his stutter returns. *Shit, I've made him nervous*, she thinks.

She says, "I just wanted you to know... I don't regret it. It was a really good kiss". He blushes, and she knows that the feelings, or a fragment of them, are still there. "I tried calling", he says, "as o-often as I could. B-But it always seemed to be at the w-wrong time". She gives a small,

sad smile, knowing exactly how he feels. "I tried calling, too. I tried calling *all* of you, actually. It was hard not hearing from you guys for so long", she admits. He suddenly takes hold of her hand, giving it a gentle squeeze. She returns the gesture. Bill looks up to see Joyce walking down the sidewalk, smiling and waving at the four teens. "Hi, Mrs. B-Byers", he says happily. She gives him a sweet smile. When Bill first met Joyce, a few days after she and her kids moved to Derry, he instantly could see how much she cared for her kids and their friends. Something that his own mother could take notes on.

"Hi, Bill", she says, "Will told me you're riding home with us?". Bill nods. "Y-Yes, ma'am. I was wondering if it would be okay if my friend, B-Beverly, rode back with us, too?". Joyce looks at the redhead beside him and smiles. "Where are my manners?", she says, holding out her hand, "I'm Joyce. Joyce Byers". Beverly takes the handshake. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Byers. I'm Beverly Marsh". She sits next to the two, watching as El and Will continue to play Frisbee. "You live in Derry?", Joyce asks. Beverly smiles. "Used to", she says, "But, I just couldn't stay away from Bill and the other boys, y'know?". Joyce nods in understanding. "I completely get it. That's how Will's friends are", she says, smiling happily as she looks at her two kids. They're happier in this moment than she's seen in a long time.

"Well, you're more than welcome to take a ride back to Derry with us. It just wouldn't be fair to stick you on a Greyhound when we're going to the same place", Joyce continues, answering Bill's question, "Fair warning, though. It's gonna be a tough fit". Beverly smiles. "Thank you, so much, Mrs. Byers". Joyce scoffs laughingly. "Please, call me Joyce", she says, "Same thing for you, Bill. 'Mrs. Byers' makes me feel old". The three laugh, before Joyce gets El and Will's attention, and the five make their way to Joyce's Pinto. Will, Bill, and Bev climb into the back, while El takes the passenger seat. As the sky turns a beautiful shade of orange, they exit Bangor city-limits, not far behind the Greyhound, unknown to them, carrying their friends.

The orange turns to a pink-magenta by the time Jonathan sees headlights in the driveway, and he looks out to see Joyce, Will, and El chatting with two other kids. One Jonathan recognizes as Bill from

down the street, and a redhead he hasn't seen before. He waits until the two part ways with his mother, brother, and foster sister, before he opens the door, urging them inside. "Mom, you gotta call Murray", he says from the get-go, "It's some serious shit". Joyce looks at him. "How serious?", she asks, slightly confused. He takes a quick glance at El, who is paying no mind to him and Joyce, and pulls his mother around the corner. Settling on the bathroom, he shuts the door, locks it, and speaks in a low voice to ensure that El and Will cannot hear them.

"Murray said he has reason to believe that Hopper could be *alive*", Jonathan reveals, "He got files from Owens after Starcourt, and he's got evidence, and he thinks the Russians have him somewhere over there". Joyce looks at him. "What?", she asks, "What do you mean 'somewhere over there'?". Jonathan sighs. "In *Russia*, mom!", he whisper-yells, "He thinks they got him when you closed *The Gate*!". She wipes her mouth for a second, looking at the corner where the floor meets the wall, before saying, "Does he think they got him, or does he think that they got him in *The Upside-Down*?". Jonathan hold his hands up. "I don't know, but if he got *in* through a Gate, wouldn't he have to come *out* of a Gate? Does that mean there's one open somewhere?", he asks. She looks at him. "I don't know", she says, "Have you seen any monsters trying to eat people recently, Jonathan?".

Suddenly, they hear something fall outside. Walking to the window, they find Bill and Beverly, staring at them like deer in headlights, Bill's shoelaces visibly entangled in his bike's chain. "We weren't eavesdropping, p-p-promise", Bill says, "We were going to b-b-bike in the woods, and this is the closest way in, b-but my shoelaces got s-s-stuck". Joyce wants to be mad, but she can't stay mad at two kids who just happened to be walking by. She opens the window. "How much did you hear?", she asks. Beverly meets her eyes. "Most of it, I think. We heard the 'Russians and Monsters' part", she says, "You wanna explain?". Joyce looks at Jonathan, who looks completely resigned. "I don't know if you'd believe us if we told you", she says.

Joyce notices Beverly rub a long scar on the palm of her hand. "Trust me, I think we will", she says determinedly, "You show us your cards, and we'll show you ours". That last part intrigues Joyce, and she

wonders just *what* the two kids have been through that could be the least bit similar. She considers a moment. "Not here", she decides, "Come around the front. Jonathan will help you with the shoelaces". The two nod and Beverly helps Bill balance as he hops with his bike beside him. Jonathan quickly helps Bill out of his predicament before they go inside. "What's going on?", Will asks, slightly confused. Joyce looks at him and El. She says, "Lots of stuff just happened, but I'll catch you up as soon as I catch these two up". El and Will sit on the couch with Bill and Bev, looking at the two other teens in confusion.

"So, what do you want to know?", Joyce asks. Beverly sits forward. "Everything. If what I'm thinking is right, we may have dealt with the same thing", she says. Joyce sighs. "It all started about two years ago...". Bill and Bev listen as Joyce recounts everything from November 6, 1983 onward, much to El and Will's confusion. When she's finished minutes later, she turns to El and Will. "Murray found some information. Information about Hop", she explains, "Jonathan and I were talking and these two accidentally overheard from outside". Beverly coughs lightly. "Did- Did these... Demogorgons... feed on your emotions? Like, fear, sadness...?", she asks. Joyce shakes her head.

"I don't think so. Why?", she asks, and, in that moment, she can see that the two have dealt with something like this before. The haunted look in their eyes says it all. "M-My brother, G-G-Georgie, died last October, and we didn't know what happened", Bill says, "Turns out, t-there's a lot more to this town than meets the eye". He and Bev spent the next fifteen minutes recounting the summer of 1985, Pennywise, and The Dead-lights. "I think this 'Upside-Down' place and wherever the dead-lights are... I think they're connected, somehow", Bev figures. Joyce stops her. "Wait, so you're sure that this... *thing*... is dead?", she asks. Bill and Bev look uncertain.

"It's active only every twenty-seven years, so we can't know for sure, until then, but, it looked like it *died* when we fought it down there", Bev says. Bill holds out his palm. "That's why we made an oath. If I-It comes back, so d-do we", he says, as Bev holds out her palm as well. they both carry identical scars on their palms. "But, enough about that. It's over for now", she says, "This is about your stuff now. This 'Hopper', he's being held by the Soviets?", Beverly asks. Joyce is now

the one who looks unsure. "We think so. But, it's a matter of how he got there. If he got there through The Upside-Down, then-". Bill interrupts her. "-T-The Gate is open", he finishes, and she nods. Jonathan leans forward. "That, or the Russians got him right before The Key exploded".

"We have to get to him", El says, whom the others have now noticed has tear tracks on her face, "We need to save him". Joyce hugs her. "We're going to try, honey, but I'm not sure if we *can*. We don't have nearly enough people behind us". Bill coughs. "B-Bev and I weren't the only two to fight the c-c-clown. There were seven of us", he says. Will pieces it together. "The Losers Club", he realizes, and Bill nods. He continues, "W-We can help. We *want* to help". El gives him a wet smile, and Beverly looks at him with pure admiration. His willingness to help, and his leadership, was always something she wished she had. Joyce nods. "I appreciate that, but I couldn't put you kids in danger. I've already done enough of that for one lifetime", she says. Beverly takes her hand. "You won't put us in danger", she says, "We've got this. We can fight". El shivers as she hears some of her last moments with Hop echo in her mind.

"Let them help", Will says, "If they can handle a shape-shifting clown that tries to eat kids, they can handle a few Russians". Bill gives will a smirk. Jonathan sighs. "I hate to say it, but they're right, Mom", he says, "The only thing we need is a *plan*". Not even a second later, the doorbell rings, and Joyce rises to see who is at the door. She opens it to find the Mike, Nancy, and the others. "Oh, thank God", she says, "Come in, there's something we need to tell you all". She lets the dozen people in, before closing it behind them. Time for a whole new 'adventure'.

4. Chapter Four: Хopper

Summary for the Chapter:

The Losers' find out; The Party prepares a rescue;
Hopper escapes; Another gate is opened

October 28, 1985

As Nancy Wheeler rings the doorbell, she's expecting a lot of things. Hugs, questions, and such. What she's *not* expecting is Joyce Byers throwing open her door, with a frantic look on her face, and ushering she and the rest inside. She's also not expecting for two other children, neither of whom she's seen before, sitting on the couch with El and Will. But, what surprises her most is the conversation that she can hear the four talking about. Topics nobody outside of their tight inner-circle should know about. Joyce seems to notice her confusion, eyes darting between the four teens and Nancy. "Sit down. All of you. There's *a lot* that we need to talk about", she says. El seems to finally notice the group in the entryway, and it takes all of two seconds for her to find Mike's face. Her face becomes bright with a smile. "*Mike!*", she exclaims, practically flying off of the couch, through the crowd, and into the boy's arms.

"Wow, El, I see how it is", Dustin playfully teases, crossing his arms. El giggles, letting go of Mike, and giving her three other best friends tight hugs. As she ends her hug with Max, the redhead takes her hands. "Is Joyce okay? What's going on?", she asks, eyeing the increasingly-nervous woman in the kitchen. Jonathan, who has since let go of Nancy, says, "We got some news. About the Russians... and Hop". As the group from Hawkins catches up with Will, El, and Jonathan, Bill and Beverly head to the kitchen, where Joyce is trying to find her cigarettes. "*Shit*", she mutters, unable to find them. Bev sighs, taking her own hidden pack from her pocket. "Here", she says, holding the half-empty pack out for the woman, "I've smoked since I was eleven. I need to dial back on them, anyway". Joyce nods, giving a slight smile as she takes the pack, lighting a cigarette and taking a drag, her nerves finally beginning to calm down. Bill finally speaks up. "Those friends we were t-telling you about", he says, "T-They might be able to h-help. D-Do you have a phone?"

"It's in the hall", Joyce says. After hearing the story from these two children, about that... *thing*... that tried to kill them, she feels confident enough to entrust these two and whoever else dealt with the creature to help. They need as much as they can get, at this point. Bill nods, heading down the hall to the phone, while Beverly stays with Joyce. "So", Bev says, unsure of what exactly to say, "You and El's dad go way back, huh?". Joyce sighs, though a smile plays on her lips as she reminisces her teen years with the man who would eventually become Chief of Hawkins Police. "Yeah. We dated in high school, actually. Had a nasty breakup, he moved away, we both got married, had kids, divorced. In his case, his daughter died, but my ex-husband was just an asshole", she explains. Bev listens intently. "Did we tell you exactly where El came from?", Joyce asks her.

"You said she was held by the government, but not much else", Bev says. Joyce nods along. "She was held by this guy, Dr. Brenner, who knew El's biological mother. They experimented different drugs on her, but they didn't know that she was pregnant at the time. They kidnapped El when she was born, made everyone else think she was dead, and kept her locked up deep in Hawkins Lab for twelve years", she explains further. Bev had heard of the lab, sure. The girl dying there, and the government covering it up, pretty much made national news last year. "So was that girl dying there any part of it?", she asks. Joyce nods. "You're talking about Barb. Yeah, she was taken late one night by the monster a little after Will was. She didn't make it out. Nancy took it hard", she says. While Bev and Joyce talk further, Bill hangs up the phone with Ben, having called Eddie, Mike, and Stan already, telling them to come to the Byers house early the next day. He dials Richie's number, and the phone buzzes.

"Hello?", Maggie Tozier's voice comes over the line. Bill gulps. "H-Hi, Mrs. T-T-Tozier. It's Bill", he says nervously, but, thankfully, the woman doesn't pick up on it. He can practically see her warm smile through the phone. "*Billy, dear, it's been too long. Are you calling for Richie?*", she asks politely. Bill affirms this to her, and she leaves to find Richie. He hears a scuffle before the trashmouth's voice is now on the line. "*Bill? What is it?*", he asks. Bill gulps again. "S-S-Something's going on. I n-need you to be at W-Will and El's house tomorrow morning, okay?". Richie notes the urgency in Bill's voice. "*Is It back?*", he asks, though, he knows better. Bill takes a deep

breath. "No. But, w-we might have something w-w-worse on our hands h-here", he says, "J-Just get over here as q-quickly as you can tomorrow, a-alright?". Richie affirms that he'll be there as soon as he can, and Bill hangs up.

"Do you kids want to stay here the night?", Joyce asks Bill and Bev, who look at her in surprise, "It's just, with everything we told you, I thought maybe you'd feel safer being over here for the night. You're coming back here in the morning, anyways". Bev would normally politely decline, but the Derry Inn is a little too far of a walk for comfort, especially with supposed Russian agents potentially still being around. "That would be wonderful. Thanks Mrs. Byers", she decides, and Bill goes along with her. Joyce waves her off. "Call me Joyce", she says, "I've got some spare blankets in the closet in the hallway. We're gonna need plenty for everybody". With that, the large group pair off into smaller groups, with the girls heading to El's room, the boys heading to Will's, while Steve, Nancy, Robin, and Jonathan cram into Jonathan's room. El, along with Erica, Max, and Bev, sit on the floor, against the bed, talking about their experiences. "We've been through *a lot* of shit", Bev observes.

"Hell yeah", Max agrees, "Between being kidnapped by the government, watching someone being torn to shreds by a fifty-foot monster, being trapped in a Russian Base, and being fucked up by a demon clown, I think we've gone through all circles of trauma". Bev snorts, as does Erica. As shitty of a situation it may be, they each think, deep down, that maybe something good can come out of this. Meanwhile, in the next room over, Bill recounts the past summer to the others, sans Will. "Holy shit", Dustin says, utterly flabbergasted, "You mean this thing could *shapeshift*? It's like the Rakshasa". Bill looks lost, but the others seem to understand what he's saying. Will seems to note his confusion. "It's DnD language", he explains, "The Rakshasa is a shapeshifter. It can change to anything it wants to, in order to hide it's true form". Bill continues to look lost. "Look", Mike says, sliding over the DnD manual from Dustin's bag, "We managed to find out where Will was when he was missing because of this book, and we figured out The Mind Flayer. It's pretty much our guide whenever this shit happens".

Bill flips through the pages, noting some of the creatures that he had

heard them talk about: *The Mind Flayer*, *The Demogorgon*, *The Rakshasa*... from what he'd been told, these descriptions are scary-accurate to how the actual beings had been described by Will and El. He also note that *The Vale* is underlined and bookmarked. "This is The U-Upside-Down, isn't it?", Bill asks. The boys nod, and Bill feels chills up his spine as he reads the description. He can't imagine *anyone* being able to survive in something like that, let alone a *twelve year-old*. "Why is it that we only make new friends when the world starts going to shit?", Will asks aloud. Thinking back to Halloween of '84, they had met Max, pulling her into everything less than a week after meeting her, and here they are, doing it again with The Losers'. He just hopes that everybody live to tell this story one day.

Nobody sleeps one bit during the night. Well, *almost* everybody. El manages to fall asleep, even with the heavy thoughts on Hop. Soon enough, her sleep deepens, and she ends up in a place that she'd definitely not expected. Her socks are gone, and she can feel the cold water on her feet. Opening her eyes, she finds nothing but darkness staring back at her. She feels a wetness on her lip, and she raises her hand, bringing it back to find nothing. She could expect it as such, but she's too surprised that she's actually there. After three months of trying, to no avail, and she just manages to do it out of the blue? Snapping from her thoughts, she decides to use it to her advantage while she's still able. Focusing on the one person she needs to see, and, sure enough, he comes from a cloud in front of her. He's smaller, and his beard is longer, but it's still him. He's staring blankly, sitting up against an unseen wall. He doesn't look weak. More like *dormant*. Before she can look much further, she's taken from the darkness of The Void by Max. El gasps as she opens her eyes, and Max is looking at her worriedly. She brings her fingers to her lip, pulling them back to find blood. Maybe her powers aren't back, but finding out Hop is alive may have just put it in the right direction.

Before long, Max has gotten Joyce, and, hearing the commotion, the others come from their respective areas, catching sight of the long-awaited nosebleed. "Did you see something?", Joyce asks, sitting El down on the couch. El nods. "I saw Hop. He looked... *smaller*", she says. Mike comes from the kitchen with a Coke in hand. Chugging it, he sits the can down on the coffee table in front of her. "We have to

be sure", he says, looking at Joyce, "We have to see how much they've come back". Joyce looks at El, who nods. She then begins focusing on the can, remembering the numerous tests in The Lab just like it. Her anger towards The Lab and those tests surge, and she crushes the can slightly, much to the bewilderment of Bill and Bev, as well as Robin. "Okay", Dustin says, "Not quite how they *used to be*, but they're on the way there". El darts up from her seat, heading up the stairs to her room. Searching her dresser, she finally finds what she's looking for in the back of her drawer. The blindfold. Grabbing her radio off of the top of the dresser on her way out, she heads for the bathroom, locking herself in. Turning on the radio, as well as the shower and sink, she ties the blindfold on.

"El, sweetie, what are you doing?", Joyce asks through the door. El closes her eyes underneath the blindfold, going into total focus. "Finding Hop", she says, before she slips in, and her nose begins to run with crimson blood. Soon enough, she once again feels the cold water enveloping her feet, back in the realm where she can hear everything and nothing. *Hop*, she thinks, *Gotta think about Hop*. She squeezes her eyes shut, thinking hard, before a colorful mist brings Hopper back to view. Trying to locate him like she did Kali, she thinks about Hop and Russia. Another gust of mist appears, bringing a sign with funny words. *Проект: ИНДИГО Объект: Камчатка*. "Kom-Yot-Ka", she reads incorrectly. Pulling off the blindfold, bringing her back to her bathroom, she focuses on the doorknob, unlocking it. Joyce Mike opens the door, with the boys looking on. "What is Kom-Yot-Ka?", she asks, eyeing Dustin, knowing well that he may hold the answers. Heading to Will's room, Dustin pulls Will's globe from his desk. Bringing it to the bathroom, he spins it until he finds Russia. He lands his finger near the northeast corner of the country. "Kamchatka", he corrects her, "You probably read it in Russian. Lots of words look just like how they do in English, with some minor differences".

The ringing of the doorbell snaps their attention. "I-I've got it", Bill says, moving quickly to the front door. Opening the door, he finds the other five members of The Losers' Club on the front porch, with confused expressions on their faces. "Bill?", Richie asks, noting that Bill is in his pajamas, "Did you stay the night?". Bill nods. "Y-You guys need to p-p-prepare yourselves", he warns, "T-This is a *whole*

lot bigger than the c-c-clown". Richie shudders. "Jeez, Bill", he hisses, "Keep your voice down". Bill opens the door further, and Bev comes closer, having been standing by the staircase. "They know", she says, "They know. We know some things, too. Things we have to tell you, because they need help". The looks on the two kids' faces is enough for Richie. "Alright, let's get inside, then", he says seriously, a very rare occurrence. The five boys slip inside, where they find the other dozen people inside. El glances at Richie, then at Mike, then at Richie, again. Apparently, she isn't the only one to see the similarity. "Mike, since when do you have a twin?", Max asks.

"That's my cousin, Richie", Mike says, still eyeing the slightly younger boy, "You're wrapped up in all this clown mess?". Richie nods. "You're wrapped up in this mess that Bill and Bev *still* haven't told any of us about?", he counters. Mike glances at his feet, nodding. "It's a lot. We're not even supposed to tell anyone else", he mutters. Max looks at El and Joyce sympathetically. "Not like we have much of a choice now, do we?", she asks. Mike glances back up. "Everything we tell you, everything that we say stays in this room. *Swear it*", he says. Bill shifts uncomfortably, remembering his own words on the side of the Kenduskeag not that long ago. "W-We swear", he speaks up. The others follow with a chorus of 'we swear' and 'you got it'. Mike sits on the Byers' recliner leaning onto his knees. "I'm sure Will's told you how he got lost in the woods a few years back?", he asks. The Losers' nod. "A little bit, but not much else", Ben says. Mike sighs. "It's a little more complicated than him getting lost in the woods..."

As Mike, once again, relays the story, with small interjections from Lucas, Dustin, and, eventually, Max, and, by the end, almost an hour has passed. The remaining five Losers' mostly have looks of disbelief on their faces, though one look at El or Will tells them otherwise. "So, this Hopper guy. He's stuck in *Russia*? Like, '*Russia*' *Russia*'?", Eddie asks. El looks at him, and nods. He takes a hit from his inhaler. "So, you want us to help you get him back?", Mikey asks, "Why? We're just a bunch of kids". Nancy stands up. "You're a bunch of *kids* who fought and killed an *inter-dimensional clown* and lived to tell the tale", she says, "You're *far* more equipped with being able to help us than a military squad if the Russians have managed to open a gate over there". Nobody had actually thought of the possibility of another machine being in Russia, like the one under Starcourt, but now it's

out in the open, and it frightens them slightly. Robin shifts closer to Steve, remembering their time of torture and imprisonment below the mall.

"What about this clown?", she asks, "Could it have come from the Upside-Down?". Mike thinks a moment, but shakes his head. "It could've come from another dimension, sure, but the Upside-Down's dimension? I don't think so. The things in there are.. *different* from what Bill and Bev described". Bev looks at him, puzzled. "You think there's more than just the Upside-Down?", she asks. Mike nods. "Yeah, but that's besides the point. The point is that the thing you fought, it didn't come from here. Hopefully, *nothing else* will make it out of that hellhole", he says. Refocusing the topic back to rescuing Hopper, the group eventually resolves that there's no other choice. They have to go get him themselves. "How the *hell* are we going to get to *Russia*? It's not like we have an airplane", Stan huffs. An idea clicks in Nancy's head. "We might not have a plane, but I know someone who does". She grabs Joyce's hand, dragging her down the hall, and to the phone. "Call him", she resolves, "Call Owens". Dialing the number Owens had left her. "*Philadelphia Public Library*", a voice answers, the same one who answered the phone a mere three months earlier. "This is Wheelbarrow", she says, having convinced Owens to let her use the name if she needed to make contact with him, "I need to talk to Sam about Antique Chariot".

There's a moment of silence. "Please hold", the voice says simply. After a minute or two of waiting, Owens finally answers, and Joyce explains what has happened since he gave Murray the files, including vague details on 'The Losers' and how they fit into the situation, before finally trying to convince him to lend them a plane. "*Joyce, you know I can't do that*", he says, "*and, even if I could, I can't just send you over there alone with those kids*". Joyce bites her lip. "El's powers are back, Sam", she reveals to him, "They've been coming back slowly, for the past few days. That's how we figured out he was in Kamchatka. Plus, we both know that these kids are better equipped than anybody to handle this, *especially* if those bastards have opened another gate. You've *seen* what they can do". A few moments of silence. "*I'll see what I can do*", he says, "*No promises, but I'll see. Officially, I can put you and Murray on the plane alone. There's a window of time that you can sneak the kids on*". Joyce finally lets out the breath

she's been holding. "Thank you, Sam. Thank you", she says, closing her eyes. A small tear rolls from her eye. *"I'll call back within the hour. Just give me some time"*, he says, before the line goes dead.

Soon enough, she gets a call back, and they're on their way to Bangor International Airport. After a few close calls, they finally get the kids on the plane, with the pilots under strict orders from Owens himself to stay quiet. "Owens said to give you this", the pilot says to Joyce, holding out a satellite phone, "If anything goes wrong over there, he said to run for the country side. Alert him with this, and he can get an under-the-radar flight into Moscow to evacuate you and the rest of you". Joyce pockets the phone in her bag. "Where are we landing?", she asks. The pilot waves her to follow him, and he pulls a map from his seat. It's a map of the area. "We're gonna try to land and drop you at a small, abandoned airstrip not far from the facility. Before that, we're gonna do some recon on the base from the air", he says, "We're gonna have to go low, so, in the unlikely event that they shoot us down, I'm gonna try to crash at the facility. They'll be too worried about putting the flames out than us trying to get inside". Joyce nods.

The plane is in the air shortly thereafter, and the kids sit strapped into their seats, nervous as anyone could be. "Shit", Richie jokes, "I forgot to buy our dear hosts some vodka! What kind of a shitty fuckin' guest am I?". It prompts very few chuckles and snorts. "Tough crowd", he mutters, though he can't blame them. It's nearly a day-long flight. Luckily, Owens managed to stage a gas leak at the school, prompting the Losers' to all say they were taking the week to hang out with their friends. Sleepovers included, as far as their parents were aware. Resolving to get their energy up, everyone, for the most part, pop a sleeping pill for the long flight. They sleep and rest until they're nearly over Russia. Soon, they're flying over the Ukrainian SSR's border, then over the base. "Recon commencing", the pilot sounds over the planes intercom, dimming the lights on-board the aircraft. After a few minutes, he says, "Recon complete". He's cut off but the explosion of the left wing on the plane. The plane engine is on fire, and the plane makes a sharp turn around. "Everyone brace for impact!", the pilot yells, before a loud whistle echoes through the aircraft, and gravity finally brings the plane to the ground.

El's ears are ringing, as she looks around to see holes in the planes

fuselage. She also sees that the cockpit, once housing the pilot, is gone, replaced by a large hole in the front of the plane. In the distance, she can see the nose of the plane, rolled over and in flames. She hears muffled sounds, before she feels someone grab her arm. "El!", Will yells, "We gotta go!". Her ears beginning to go to normal, she now hears the sounds of sirens, not unlike the ones she heard at the lab as a child. Eerie, terrifying wails of the sirens echo through the whole area, and she now realizes that the pilot did, in fact, manage to crash-land over the base's fences. Seeing a line of soldiers heading their way, El raises her arm, as concussed as she is, and manages to snap each of their necks. Six soldiers in all, she counts, before she sees Joyce, Mike, and Lucas run for them. "We need the defense!", Mike yells, quickly handing a gun off to Bill and Nancy, while Will takes one from Lucas. Bev picks a combat knife off of a dead soldier's corpse. "What now?", she asks, looking around for any more soldiers. All of them must be underground, because she doesn't see any more.

"We get inside", Dustin says, dangling a key-card in his hand. Robin looks over the uniforms, haunted by the red badges and stars she'd had nightmares of for months. "He's gotta be here", she says, looking at Steve. He knows who she's talking about. "If that Ruskie bastard is here, I'm making sure he's dead this time", he says coldly. They move to the base entrance, entering at the bottom of a mountainside. Sliding the key-card, they hear the alarm sound, and the door begins to mechanically unlock. Those armed ready themselves. "Are you ready?", Joyce asks, "Let's do this".

He can vaguely hear the explosion overhead when it happens. When the sirens start blaring, and Hopper hears his cell door click, he doesn't know what to do. "Shit", he mutters, "I'm gonna get myself killed one of these days". As soon as a guard opens the door to secure him, he bolts up, choking the man out and dragging him inside. Taking his uniform and equipment, he makes his way out of the cell, manually locking the cell door from the outside. The gunfire is more prominent in the hall where he can see another soldier firing at an unseen figure. It's only when the unseen figure leaps into view, that he sees the thing that's plagued his nightmares for three years. It

looks less damaged, it's skin much whiter than the one he'd seen, but he's sure of it. The Demogorgon standing nearly 45 feet away from him is what The Russians had been keeping downstairs, feeding the poor prisoners of this godforsaken place to it.

Slowly backing away, he hears his foot splash into a puddle, made from a long-forgotten mop bucket. The creature darts it's head in his direction, it's flower-like mouth twitching, before it opens and lets out an unearthly chitter. "Shit, shit, *shit!*", he repeats to himself, before he darts down the hall next to him as it begins to leap and lunge for him. Narrowly missing the bloody claws, he fires a few shots at it, finding the creature to be much weaker than the one he'd heard of. Rather than the bullets practically doing no damage, as he'd heard Jonathan once say, they slow the creature down. As it licks it's wounds, he darts down various hallways, going in no particular direction but upwards, he run smack into Ozerov. It takes the Russian a moment to grasp who he's run into, but he pulls a knife from his belt. "Where are you going, *Jim Hopper?*", he mocks, not hesitating to start slashing the knife towards Hopper, not unlike any deranged killer he'd dealt with in New York City.

Hopper tries to get a shot, but the man practically punches the gun, sending it firing all around the hall. Hopper drops the gun, opting to tackle the Russian man. He does so successfully, but the man elbows him hard in the upper back and lower neck, sending Hopper to the ground. "You've been pain in my side for far too long", Ozerov hisses, raising the knife to kill. He doesn't bring it down, however, as he's distracted by the loud shout from the unseen end of the hall, and all Hopper sees is a bright flash of blue tackling the man before he's shutting his eyes from the pain in his back. Being in a Russian prison will do that to a person. Make them unable to stand much pain after a while. He hears an American voice. "Christ, I've wanted to do that for a long time", the voice says, and Hopper catches the blurry sight of a man with a mullet, brown shirt, and blue jacket, before his vision clears, and he realizes he recognizes the man.

"*Steve?*", he asks, "What in the *hell?*". Steve is surprised by the voice coming from the ground, and about goes to kick Hop to hell, but stops when he sees the older man's face. "Hop? Christ, I didn't recognize you. Between the beard, lost weight, and outfit, I thought

you were just some soldier that asshole was beating up". Holding out his hand for Hopper, the cop takes it, and Steve helps him up. "What the *fuck* are you doing here?", Hopper asks, both furiously and thankfully. Furious because the kid could've literally *died*, but thankful because he's talking to someone he actually *knows*, and it's been too long since he's done that. "We're here to rescue you! *Duh!*", Steve says, "You think El wouldn't be able to find you, eventually?". Hopper pales slightly. "El's *here!?*", he practically yells, "*Where is she!?*".

"She's with Joyce, scouting the lockup on the upper level", Steve says, "Robin, Nancy, and I came down here, just in case. Speaking of, let's get a move-". Hopper practically shoves Steve out of the way as Ozerov runs at them from where he now stood. Hopper grabs the man who caused him so much pain for the last few months, throwing him to the ground. "*You aren't keeping me from my daughter for a second longer*", Hopper hisses at the man as he grabs his collar, before he shoves the general's blade straight into his chest. Ozerov coughs blood up as he bleeds onto the floor, before his face loses color and he passes out, likely not to wake up ever again. He stands, going to Steve, who is on the floor, and holds out his hand. "Let's get the fuck outta here", Hopper says, "I've had enough of Russia for a *lifetime*".

As the two walk the hall, Hopper asks, "If El's been looking, how come it took so long? Don't get me wrong, I know her powers can be like that, but she can usually find someone in just a second". Steve bites his lip. "El lost her powers after Starcourt", Steve explains, "But when she found out you were potentially alive, they just, kind of, *came back*, y'know? She managed to narrow down where you were a few days ago, and Owens helped us engineer a rescue". Before Hopper can question any further, a gun is pointed in his face by none other than Nancy Wheeler, who looks ready to blow his head off until she studies his face. "Shit", she says, dumbfounded, "Sorry. I thought you were one of those *soldiers*". He puts his hand on her shoulder. "Don't sweat it, kid", he says, "Now, where's El?".

"Not in here", Jonathan says as he closes one of the many cell doors on the underground level. Lot's of searching, but no results. Joyce purses her lips. "Shit", she says, "We've gotta find him". Bill and Stan

come from another cell. "Nobody here on this level remotely speaks English", Stan observes, "I don't think they keep the Americans here". They hear the click of a weapon behind them, and turn to see a group of six soldiers, holding El, Eddie, and Mikey at gunpoint. One raises the butt of his rifle and knocks El out, while the other two are simply shoved to the floor. "Right you are, *child*", one soldier says in his thick Russian accent. In the other direction, the others are being brought to them in the same manner. "*You bastards*", Mike mutters as he's shoved towards the group, crawling over to El. The lead soldier smiles cynically. "Any last words?", he asks the group, motioning for the soldiers surrounding them to raise their weapons.

"I've got some words for you, asslovsky: *fuck you!*", a voice growls from behind the soldiers. Hopper bolts from behind a pillar, as do Nancy and Steve on the other sides, and spray the soldiers with bullets. As the last body falls, Hopper catches sight of Joyce, and then his daughter on the ground. He rushes to El's side, and Joyce edges closer. "Hop", she says, because it's all she *can* say. As he holds El in his arms, he looks at her. "I guess I owe you that date, huh?", he jokes. She laughs and sobs, hugging him tightly. He looks to the kids he doesn't recognize. "Steve? When did you adopt more children?", Hopper asks, unsure of who the kids are or why they're here. Mike looks to The Losers'. "They're our friends. They know everything. They've been through shit, too. Now's not the time to talk about it, though. We've gotta get out of here!", he says quickly.

"The plane's crashed", Joyce says dejectedly, "I have the satellite phone to get Owens, but how are we gonna get to Moscow from *here*?". Hopper thinks back to the Demogorgon. "They had one of those things that took Will", he reveals, "If there wasn't an open gate, it would be dead, right?". Will seems to realize what he's saying. "You're not suggesting that we-?", he starts. Hopper raises his hand and nods. "That's *exactly* what I'm suggesting", he says, "We don't exactly have any other options, here". Stan shrugs. "Alright, then", he says, picking up a handgun, "Let's find this gate, and get the *hell* back home". Marching down the stairwell Hopper directs them to, all the way to the lowest level, they find a bloodbath, no doubt from the Demogorgon. "Is it still down here?", Will asks, eyes darting around. Hopper shrugs, keeping his gun raised. "I honestly don't know, kid", he says, "I shot it, and got the hell out before it could follow It

probably went for the upper levels". A growl behind him says otherwise.

The creature, now bearing further gunshot wounds than what Hopper had left it with, stumbles forward, dazed but ready to attack. "Fire!", Hopper commands, and the barrage of bullets almost tear the monster apart. When the gunfire ceases, the monster is unmoving. "You had to hide from *that* creepy fucker?", Richie asks Will, "Christ, I commend you, dude". Hopper looks to the gate, open just enough for them to slip inside two at a time. "There's gonna be more in there", he warns, "and Moscow is over three hundred miles away. Are we sure we're ready for this? There's no turning back". The teens all look at each other, faces uncertain, before they harden and each gives a nod. Taking turns, starting with Bev and Max, the group slowly file through the gate, out of Russian clutches and into the uncertainty of the Upside-Down.

5. Chapter Five: The Void

Summary for the Chapter:

El is stuck; Will goes after El; An old threat emerges in the form of a dead friend; The Battle of The Minds ensues

October 29, 1985

The muffled whispers cloud El's mind as she feels herself being carried by someone. Slowly opening her eyes, she can make out hazy shapes, coated in a dark-blue hue. "No", she murmurs, her head still pounding from a possible concussion. Her vision begins to clear even more, and she looks at the person who is carrying her. "It's okay, kid", Hopper says, eyes gleaming with tears, "It's okay". El's eyes widen, and she throws her arms around him, sobbing. "Hop", she says, unable to get any other words out. She clings to him as he holds her closer. As he holds her, he looks to Will, who looks utterly terrified to be back in the godforsaken place he was trapped in for a week. "Hey", he says, nudging Will, "It's different now. We're all together. Nobody's alone". Will nods, though he makes a loud gulp. "I know", he says, "I'm just afraid that *he'll* know we're here". He keeps holding the back of his neck, waiting for the sensation he's come to know so well.

"If he *does* find out we're in here", Beverly says, "It would still need to travel all the way from Upside Down Hawkins to here, right? Even that thing can't go *that* fast". Richie is nearby, as he pokes what looks like a long-dead, decaying tree. He lifts his fingers off, goo trailing in a long string between him and the tree. "Gross", he says, wiping his hand on his shirt, "You were in here for a *week*?". Will nods, and Richie claps him on the back. "I commend you, William. This is tough fucking *shit*". Having made it into what *would be* the Russian wilderness, there isn't much to take cover. "We need to keep going", Hopper says, "and we need to find shelter". Walking slightly further Northwest, they come upon a sign. "It's a town sign", Nancy observes, "Otrez". Sure enough, the indistinct edges of buildings can barely be seen through the spore-filled fog. "L-Let's go", Bill says, "It's p-p-probably safer to go into a higher floor". Hopper nods in agreement. "Good thinking, kid", he complements, heading towards what looks

like a hotel.

Heading inside the building, and up the stairwell, the group finds a decent enough place to stay for the time being. Being so far up inside, there's less vines on the floors and walls, allowing them to actually sit down. Laying El on the hotel room's bed, Hop turns to the group. "So, does anyone have a map?", he asks, "or was the plan to just come be with me in great ol' mother Russia?". Nancy pulls a map from her bag. She lays it out on the table, and she, Jonathan, and Max hold flashlights to it. "This is where we found you. The Kamchatka facility in the Tambov Oblast. We need to get to Moscow, and that's about seven hours *driving*, so it's more like three and a half *days* if we walk", she says, moving her finger along a path between Kamchatka and Moscow.

"Do we know if cars work in the Upside Down?", Mikey asks, "I mean, assuming they're like their counterparts in our world, they've gotta have gas, right?". Hopper and Joyce look at each other. "We, uh, we never really thought about that", Hop admits, "It's definitely something to try, though". Nancy brings out a red marker, tracing possible paths to Moscow before tossing the marker away. The guttural sound of The Demogorgon can be heard in the distance. "Looks like someone made alerted his little friends before he died", Stan says bluntly, "If we want to live, we've gotta get this figured out fast". Hop looks over to El.

"I really don't want to leave her right now", he says, "but I think it's best if me and a few others head out there to find some working vehicles. Me, Joyce, Jonathan, and Nancy are headed out. Steve, you're on babysitting duty. *Again*". Steve rolls his eyes. "Yeah, yeah, I got it, Chief", he says, "C'mon, pee brains, let's try and help El out while we can". As the four leave the room, Steve and the kids crowd around the bed. "I might be able to help her", Eddie says, "I might have something in my fanny pack". Richie snorts. "Alas, the good ol' fanny pack saves the day *again*! Good on you, Doctor K. Pip pip, wot wot", he says, in his usually awful British accent. Eddie rolls his eyes, and searches through his pack. *Nothing*. "Shit", Eddie mutters. However, Will notices something.

"She's in The Void", he says, "Look". He points towards her eyes, where they are visibly moving underneath her eyelids. Dustin's brain

clicks, and he has an idea. "You're able to know when the Mind Flayer is near, but that's about as far as we know in *our world*", he says to Will, "You haven't been back into the Upside Down since before it got you at Halloween. What if you're able to do more in here, since you're more connected?". Lucas snaps his fingers. "Like a better connection", he agrees, "If Will's in the Upside Down, whatever he's able to do is gonna be more amplified, and who's not to say that he doesn't have *more* powers when we're in here?". All eyes turn to Will, who looks lost and shy.

"So, you want me to try and go into The Void?", he asks uncertainly. Dustin nods. "In short, yes", he says, "There's a chance that you might actually be able to". Erica nods in agreement. "If I've learned anything from this nerd", she says, referring to Dustin, "It's that he knows his shit. So, go on". She waves her hand, gesturing him to sit on the bed, next to El. As Mike turns his radio to a static frequency, Bev rips a piece of her dress off, folding it into a thick band. "El said that she needed something like this before. You probably will too, right?". Will takes it. "Thanks", he says, "If I get in there, I'm gonna find El, and the second I do, you pull me out, alright?". He looks at Mike when he says this. "Right", Mike agrees, "Find El, get her to wake up, and we pull you out. Easy peasy".

Will wraps the cloth around his head, shielding his eyes from the already dark room. He begins to focus on the static, and the static only. El had told him the trick to it only once before, but that was just during an explanation. Never did Will think he would *actually* get to use it. Will sits for a few minutes, concentrating on the static, failing to feel the trickle of blood running to his upper lip. Just when he gives up, he opens his eyes, to find nothing. Just a large, black space. *The Void*. "I'm in", Will says out loud, unsure if his friends can hear him, "I'm in the void". Dustin's voice echoes throughout the vast space. "Good. Just concentrate on El, and maybe she'll appear", it says. Will nods, though he's sure nobody can see it. Concentrating on El, it takes a moment for a flash of yellow to appear from the distant mist.

"El?", Will asks. El turns to him. Her mouth is wide and agape. "Will?", she asks, approaching, "You can... see me?". Will nods. "I'm in The Void. Looking for you", he says. She furrows her brow, implying

that she has questions, but she decides to press on it later. "Can't get out", she says, gesturing to the endless darkness around them. Will nods, slowly understanding. "You got hit on the head pretty hard", he says, "Maybe you're just... stuck. Hop, Joyce, Jonathan, and Nancy went to go look for a car. They'll be back in a bit, but it would probably be better if you were conscious by the time they get back". El nods in agreement. "But, how?", she inquires, "Still stuck".

"That sounds like a problem", another voice says, very unexpectedly. The two turn to see the figure of Billy Hargrove. "Billy?", Will asks, unsure of what to make of this. He turns to El. She glares daggers at the figure before them. "No", she says, "Not Billy. Mind Flayer". The Mind Flayer smirks at them, walking closer. "You can't leave, because I'm not letting you", it says, "Granted, the bump on your head isn't helping your matters at all". Will grabs El's hand, standing defensively. "We aren't afraid of you", he says, "You can't hurt us anymore". The faux-Billy laughs. "That's where you're wrong", it says, "You're on my turf, now. It may take time to get to you, but I will, and I will end *every* last one of you. You've been thorns in my side long enough. With you out of the way, I will find a way back in, and I will complete what I started".

"El, we have to fight", Will decides, "*Both of us*". If this thing can hold El in The Void, she can surely fight back and escape. She's done it before. Back at The Cabin. But it's better prepared this time. Will has an idea. "If he can manipulate this place, that means we can too", he says to her, and he closes his eyes. When he opens them, the three find themselves in Hawkins Lab. "Now we leveled the playing field", he says to El, "Run!". The two dash down the large, white hallway, passing the growing vines on the wall and spores in the air. "How...?", El begins to ask, though she knows that Will doesn't know how he did it. It just... *happened*.

"I think we can you this to our advantage", Will says to himself, "Where is the armory?". Running down the hall, and banking, right, then left, then left again, he finds a door marked *Armory*. "El?", Will asks, gesturing to her opening the door. She does so with ease, blowing the door off it's own hinges. Entering the room, Will grabs whatever gun he thinks is in the armory. In this case, it's a Colt M1911. "Let's get this motherfucker", he says, determined to put

down the Void-Billy. Will closes his eyes, and, when he opens them, they're at a new location. *The Rift*.

"You think these games can fool me, child?", the monster asks angrily, "I can play this game, too". The Demogorgon appears from The Rift, prepared to attack and kill. Will and El ready themselves, he with his gun, and she with her mind. "If he can bring in people, we can too", El says to herself. She closes her eyes, conjuring Void versions of her friends, Hop, and Kali. "Nice job, sister", Void Kali compliments, though El knows the comment is truly coming from herself. Steve and Nancy run for the elevator to the lab, The Demogorgon going after them. Looking on, El returns her sight to The Mind Flayer, who has now brought others into the fold, as well. The Flayed, Demodogs, and Demogorgons alike, ready to attack and win this battle of the minds.

Robin and Erica take on a Demodog, kicking the thing mercilessly to hell, while Jonathan and Hopper fire off rounds at the multiple flayed, their bodies bowing apart into gelatinous mass as they die. Max and the boys run around, dousing the entire cavern in gasoline, lighting it up. It all seems so real to the two teenagers, but they know better. As the fire eats at everything and everyone, El sends a psionic wave at The Flayer. She approaches it's defeated form on the ground, but it grabs her hand.

She opens her eyes, revealing that she has returned to The Void in it's normal state. "Will?", she asks aloud, noting his absence, "Will?". Footsteps behind her make her turn hopeful, but her trust in The Void is betrayed when she finds the form of Martin Brenner approaching. "You let us in. We *tried* to stay. You *kicked us out*. I will find you, and I will *end* you", The faux-Papa says. "*Get away!*", El screams, overcome with emotion from seeing her Papa. Everything goes black. She opens her eyes to find herself on a bed, still in The Upside Down. She turns her head to find Will, also awakening, with blood streaming from his nose at vast rates.

"We've been trying to wake you both up for hours", Hopper says, "We came back to find you both unconscious, and Mike said you were both in The Void". El nods. "The Mind Flayer. It knows we're here. Trapped me in The Void", she says, lifting her finger and tapping her temple. Eddie gulps out loud. "The thing that possessed Will and

made people into mindless exploding jello freaks knows we're here? *Great. Just great*", he deadpans. Erica eyes him. "That's literally *what she just said*", she retorts, "No need for a play-by-play, especially after we've gotten one, nerd".

"Enough!", Hopper yells, "We have vehicles downstairs. *Get to them, now*". The teenagers scramble out, with the exception for Mike and Bill, who help El and Will off the bed, helping their wobbly forms to the cars. As everyone makes it to the cars, a Demogorgon appears down the street. "Oh, *joy*", Steve sarcastically says, "I was beginning to miss this stupid shithead". Swinging his bat around, Steve readies himself when the monster pounces, and he hits it across the chest, nails ripping some of it's skin. He hits it again, around where it's knee would be this time. He's about to hit it one more time when it claws at his arm, leaving some tears through his jacket, and bloody wounds. "Oh, you're *so gonna regret that*", Steve says, smashing the thing in the face.

Hopper arrives from upstairs, and brandishes his AK-47 before firing upon the son of a bitch. The Demogorgon stumbles as the bullets enter and tear through it's body, before it collapses into a heaping mess on the vine-covered pavement. "Let't get in the car, and you can get that looked at, kid", Hopper says, clapping the teen on the back. The group files into two military jeeps and a transport van, before heading Northwest for Moscow. El and Will return to sleep, exhausted from their experience in The Void.

Hours later, the two awake, finding themselves about halfway to Moscow, where they begin telling what had happened. "The Mind Flayer", El says, "It trapped me in The Void. Will found me". Will nods, but looks nervous. "I got trapped there, too. But, something... *happened*", he says, "I was able to change where we were. Like, we were in El's normal Void. Y'know, watery floor, endless darkness? Well, I closed my eyes, thought about it, and suddenly we were in Hawkins Lab". The group listens curiously at how he explains. "We ran, and we found an armory. I think we were able to use the weapons in there, because we *believed* they would hurt it", he continues, "We brought people in there, too. All of you were there. El's sister was there. The Mindflayer brought The Flayed, Demodogs, and Demogorgons. Hell, it took the form of *Billy* while we were in

there".

Max shifts uncomfortably. Even in death, her stepbrother was *still* being used as a pawn for that bastard. She clenches her fists tightly, knuckles whitening. "That's not it, though", El says, "It let Will go, but then it looked like *Papa*. It said it knew we were here, and it would kill us". Richie vomits profusely out the window. "This is fuckin' *heavy*, kiddos", he says, "This is heavier than the clown. The group goes silent as they continue to drive, unaware of the dark, cloudy form quickly making it's way to Russia.

Notes for the Chapter:

And, thus, Chapter Five! It's a bit shorter than other chapters, but I think Chapter Four being 2000 words longer made up for it in a sense. With college, work, writers block, and such, I didn't think I'd be able to deliver. But, with a dash of Doctor Sleep, a sprinkle of Dead By Daylight, and a shitload of 'This thing kills monsters, if you believe it does', I was able to scrap what I had written and write a new chapter from the ground up. The idea came to me when I had ran into a dead-end midway through writing, and I went to see Doctor Sleep. SPOILER ALERT! The entire concept of being able to conjure places within the mind was a fantastic idea on their part, and I felt reinvigorated.

I incorporated that into the chapter, as well as a few references to Dead By Daylight (i.e. The vines following them down the white hallway, as well as Steve and Nancy going for the lab with the Demogorgon following). It made for a quick break from the craziness of the last chapter, and for a good intro to The Mind Flayer making it's way to Russia.

As always, please be sure to let me know what you thought, what you would've liked to see, and what you will like to see in upcoming chapters! I always appreciate you guys commenting (I'm looking at you, dvrajcula on Wattpad!) and I will actively try to keep

on this to make sure I get the next chapter out quicker than this time. Not making any promises, but I'll try. On a plus note, I'm releasing this at 12:00 AM on 11/27/19, which means I made my exact deadline of releasing this on Thanksgiving!

Next Chapter: 'Chapter Six: The Shadow'